



A Companion to Assyria

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A COMPANION TO
ASSYRIA

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EF

Introduction

Eckart Frahm

Aims and Scope of this Book

Assyria was one of the great civilizations of the ancient world. It had a long and variegated history, with beginnings in the third millennium and various phases of growth and decline. During the eighth and seventh century BCE, Assyria became what many consider the first empire in world history, its borders stretching from the Persian Gulf to central Anatolia and from the Zagros mountains in Iran to the Egyptian Nile. The main beneficiaries of this unprecedented accumulation of power and wealth were the Assyrian military and administrative elites and, most notably, the Assyrian kings, who used a mixture of political cunning, military force, and administrative malleability to forward the Assyrian cause. Between 616 and 609 BCE, after a dramatic showdown with the Babylonians and Medes, the Assyrian state collapsed, and only vestiges of Assyrian culture survived. But the imperial structures built by the Assyrian kings provided a blueprint for the later empires of ancient Western Asia, beginning with the Babylonians and Persians. And Israelites and Greeks, while oblivious of earlier Mesopotamian rulers, immortalized in their historical writings their encounters with the great Assyrian kings (and a few queens) of the first millennium BCE. Thus, Assyria lived on, both in the political and administrative institutions of later states and, thanks to the Bible and classical authors, in the cultural memory of the Western (and Middle Eastern) world.

For a long time, this afterlife remained a rather shadowy one. Over a period of more than two millennia, the imperial cities of ancient Assyria lay buried under heaps of rubble, and no one was familiar any more with the languages the Assyrians had spoken and the literatures they had studied. It was only in the middle of the nineteenth century, when British and French adventurers, diplomats, and scholars embarked on excavations in Nineveh, Kalḫu (Calah), and Dur-Šarrukīn, that Assyria's ancient civilization began to reemerge. In palaces, temples, and private houses, impressive examples of Assyrian artwork and tens of thousands of Assyrian texts came to light, the latter ranging from literary and scholarly works to royal inscriptions, state correspondence, and economic documents. Many of the finds uncovered by the European explorers were transferred to the British Museum in London and the Louvre in Paris.

Once the Sumero-Akkadian cuneiform writing system was deciphered, an

achievement of the late 1840s and early 1850s, scholars were able to embark on the long and arduous task of reconstructing Assyrian history and culture based on original sources. Their work has now proceeded for more than 150 years, with new discoveries requiring repeated revisions of earlier views and giving rise to new directions in research. The twentieth-century excavations in Assyria's long-time capital Ashur, for example, and in Kültepe (Kaniš), a city in central Anatolia with a settlement of Assyrian traders, have given us a much better view of the earlier periods of Assyrian history, up to then largely shrouded in darkness.

Future discoveries and new scholarly agendas will undoubtedly advance our understanding of Assyrian history and culture even further. But the materials at our disposal are now so rich and so well studied that the time seems ripe for a volume to summarize our current knowledge and provide an overview of Assyrian history and culture throughout the ages. Except for a few excellent but very short overviews (e.g., Cancik-Kirschbaum 2008; Radner 2015), there is, somewhat surprisingly, no such volume yet.¹ The present book, with its thirty-two chapters on Assyrian geography, history, and culture, aims to fill the gap. While obviously not comprehensive, the book seeks to provide enough information to help readers gain a more in-depth idea of the rich world of ancient Assyria. As for those who wish to go beyond what the volume has to offer, they will find ample material in the “guides to further reading” and the substantial bibliographies that accompany individual chapters.

Assyrian Civilization and its Study: Some Fundamentals

Geography

Assyria can be subdivided into three geographical zones (see [Chapter 1](#)). Its heartland, situated east of the Tigris in what is now the northeastern portion of the Republic of Iraq, was demarcated by the cities of Ashur in the south, Nineveh in the north, and Arbela in the east. These three important cities formed what has been dubbed the “Assyrian triangle” (Radner 2011), with a fourth one, Kalḫu, situated in the center. Assyria's closer periphery reached to the Cizre plain in the north, the foothills of the Iranian Zagros mountains in the east, the border with Babylonia, in central Iraq, in the south, and the Khabur valley in the west, in modern Syria. From the 13th century BCE onwards, and especially during Assyria's imperial phase in the first millennium BCE, Assyria also comprised a further periphery, which stretched in some periods as far as Babylonia in the south, Elam in the east, and the

eastern Mediterranean and even Egypt in the west (see [Figure 0.1](#)).

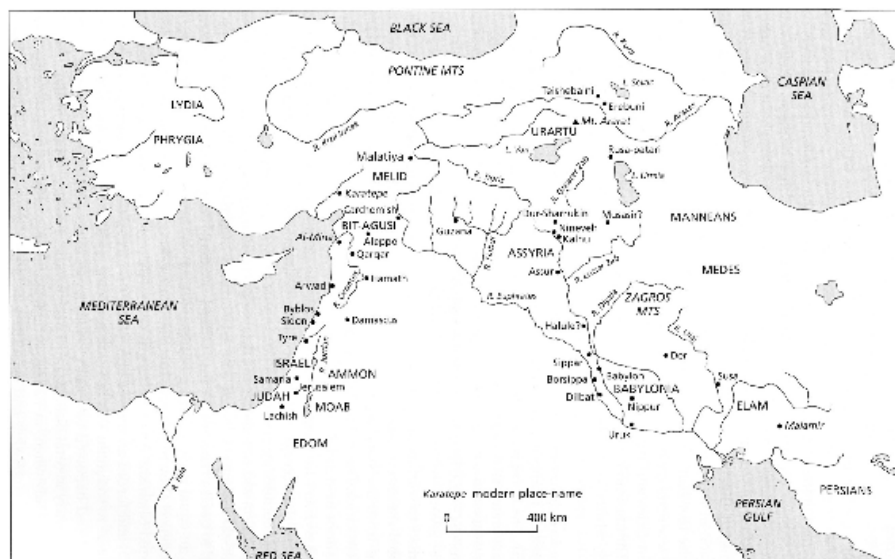


Figure 0.1 Map of the ancient Near East in the first millennium BCE.

Source: M. Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East ca. 3000–323 BC*, 3rd ed., Malden, 2016, 8, Map 1.1. Reproduced with permission of Wiley Blackwell.

Sources

Our reconstruction of Assyrian history and culture is based on a plethora of sources. Of particular significance are tens of thousands of cuneiform texts from various Assyrian and non-Assyrian sites, written by Assyrian scribes on clay tablets in Assyrian, Babylonian, and Sumerian language. Important to keep in mind is that their distribution, both in time and space, is highly uneven.

For the third millennium (see [Chapter 2](#)), the textual evidence is meager, and most of our knowledge about developments in the Middle Tigris region and Upper Mesopotamia in general comes from uninscribed archaeological sources. Much richer for the study of Assyrian history and culture is the textual record from the first centuries of the second millennium, the so-called Old Assyrian period (see [Chapters 3](#) and [4](#)). Some 23,000 tablets inscribed in Assyrian are known from this time. Practically all of them originate from a site outside Assyria proper, Kültepe (Kaniš) in central Anatolia. The tablets deal almost exclusively with the activities of the Assyrian merchant colony located there and their interactions with their families in Ashur. We therefore know a lot about the socio-economic conditions of the Old Assyrian period, the long-distance trade in which the Assyrian merchants were engaged, and

the individual biographies of some of them, but comparatively little about Assyria's political history, even though there are a few short inscriptions of the Old Assyrian rulers of Ashur.

One source type first attested in the Old Assyrian period is the “eponym list,” which records in sequential order the officials after whom individual years were named. The Assyrians used this dating system throughout their history. Lengthy eponym lists, which together with king lists serve as the chronological backbone of our reconstruction of Assyrian history, are available for substantial portions of the Old Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods, but not for Middle Assyrian times.²

The Middle Assyrian period (see [Chapters 6](#) and [7](#)), which followed the Old Assyrian era after a “Dark Age” that lasted from the 17th to the 15th century BCE (see [Chapter 5](#)), has left us fewer but more diverse texts, discovered in Ashur and a few other cities in central Assyria and eastern Syria. They include detailed royal inscriptions, political letters, administrative documents, epics, and scholarly texts from Assyria's main urban centers, all of them important for our understanding of the history, culture, and socio-economic conditions of the Middle Assyrian state.

By far the richest textual evidence is available for the so-called Neo-Assyrian period, which lasted from the tenth to the seventh century BCE (see [Chapters 8](#) and [9](#)). Particularly well documented are the roughly one hundred years from 745 to 631 BCE during which Assyria ruled over most of Western Asia. Thousands of often long and detailed royal inscriptions, and thousands of political letters, the “state correspondence” of the empire, found in Kalḫu and Nineveh, cast light on the political history of the period, while the roughly 20,000 scholarly and literary tablets and fragments from Assurbanipal's famous library at Nineveh, created in the mid-seventh century BCE, provide a detailed panorama of the intellectual pursuits in which members of the Late Assyrian elite were engaged. Numerous scholarly and literary texts were also discovered in Neo-Assyrian Ashur, Kalḫu, and Sultantepe ([Chapters 20](#) and [21](#)). Thousands of legal texts, especially debt notes and sale documents, inform us about the social and economic history of the Neo-Assyrian period and provide us with glimpses into the lives of non-elite Assyrians, such as small traders, farmers, and slaves.

Texts written by other people in the ancient Near East also cast light on Assyrian history and culture. Examples include Sumerian economic documents from southern Mesopotamia from the 21st century BCE, diplomatic letters from 18th-century Mari in eastern Syria, royal inscriptions and letters from the Hittite capital Ḫattuša from the second half of the second millennium, inscriptions in Luwian hieroglyphs from early Iron Age Syria and Anatolia, and Babylonian Chronicles from the late first millennium BCE. The reports on Assyrian history found in the Bible and the writings of Greek and Roman authors provide some interesting information as well. Though often

historically inaccurate, they illuminate how the Assyrian state was perceived by less powerful neighbors and later tradition.

Attempts to reconstruct the history and culture of ancient Assyria cannot be based on written documents only. In fact, the material remains of Assyrian city walls, palaces, temples, and domestic quarters tell us a lot about the way ancient Assyrian city-dwellers, whether rich or poor, lived their lives (see [Chapter 23](#)); and images on large artifacts such as bas-reliefs or stelae or on small ones such as cylinder or stamp seals provide us with pictorial evidence of Assyrian deities and demons, the ways the Assyrians practiced warfare, and the urban and non-urban landscapes they inhabited (see [Chapter 24](#)).

Because the political situation in Iraq has significantly limited archaeological work in the Assyrian core area during the past decades, newly developed scientific methods such as paleobotanical and archaeometrical analysis have been applied only sparingly at the main Assyrian sites in the Tigris region. However, thanks to surveys in eastern Syria that were conducted before the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, and successful attempts in recent years to use satellite imagery, we now have a much improved understanding of settlement patterns, agricultural structures, and the distribution of roads and canals in the Assyrian heartland and its periphery (see [Chapters 1](#) and [2](#)).

Continuity and change in Assyrian history and culture

The aforementioned subdivision of Assyrian history into three periods, Old Assyrian, Middle Assyrian, and Neo-Assyrian (followed by a long “post-imperial” era, see [Chapter 10](#)), was devised by modern scholars and is primarily based on changes affecting the Assyrian language (see [Chapter 17](#)). Historically, it is somewhat problematic – the transitions between the periods were gradual and not marked by clearly identifiable historical events. Nonetheless, there are a number of characteristic political and cultural features that distinguish the three eras. They go hand in hand with some remarkable continuities that imbue the span of Assyrian history with a considerable degree of coherence.

With regard to Assyria’s territorial extent, we can trace, despite occasional setbacks, a steady development towards ever greater size. For most of the Old Assyrian period, Ashur was the center of a small city state. Even though the merchants of Ashur travelled wide and far, cities such as Nineveh were not under Ashur’s control yet. In the 18th century, the Amorite king Šamši-Adad I brought Ashur for a short time into his large Upper Mesopotamian kingdom, but without making it his main residence. The situation changed in Middle Assyrian times, when Ashur grew into the political and religious capital of an

influential territorial state reaching from the Khabur region in the west to the foothills of the Zagros in the east. Only now do we find references to the “land of Ashur” (*māt Aššur*) in the textual record and can speak of an “Assyria” in the strict sense of the word. Finally, in the Neo-Assyrian period, Assyria expanded even further, morphing into an empire that dominated much of Western Asia.

Throughout all this territorial change, there was, however, also some continuity, especially with regard to the role played by the city of Ashur. It served as Assyria’s political capital until 879 BCE, when Aššurnāširpal II moved the royal court to Kalḫu. But Ashur remained a highly important cultural and religious center much longer. Up to the last decades of the Assyrian state, Assyrian kings would spend the winter months in Ashur to participate in various religious festivities. They also continued to be buried there, in vaults located under the floors of Ashur’s “Old Palace.”

Ashur’s status was closely linked to the god who shared his name with the city and had his temple there. Throughout the history of Ashur and Assyria, the god Assur served as the state’s foremost deity (see [Chapter 18](#)).³ As a consequence of the political transformations Assyria experienced over the course of this long period, Assur’s “character” changed as well – from *numen loci* into powerful divine king, with a family of his own. Yet he never ceased to define the religious identity of the Assyrian people and particularly their rulers. Even after the downfall of the Assyrian empire, Assur continued to be worshipped in his city, and some of the festivals held in honor of Assur and his wife Šerua were still celebrated in the second century AD (see [Chapter 10](#)).

While Assur served as Assyria’s divine protector, the Assyrian king embodied the earthly dimensions of the Assyrian state. But contrary to what one might expect, the autocratic type of rule that characterized Assyria’s political system during the imperial period came into being relatively late. During the Old Assyrian period, the Assyrian city state had a far more complex political structure, one that some have characterized, in reference to Aristotle, Polybius, and other classical political theorists, as a “mixed constitution” (Liverani 2011). There was a “democratic” component, provided by the city assembly, an aristocratic one, provided by the eponyms (*līmum*), who were probably chosen from among the landholding and mercantile elites, and a monarchical one, represented by a hereditary ruler. This ruler did not yet bear the traditional Mesopotamian title “king” (*šarrum*), which was instead associated with the god Assur. Rather, he was known as the “prince” (*rubā’um*), the “representative of the god Assur” (*iššiak Aššur*), and the “overseer” (*waklum*), a title referring to his legal functions.

It was not until the 14th century BCE, under Aššur-uballiṭ I, that Assyrian rulers began to call themselves *šarrum*. From this time onwards, the Assyrian kings accumulated more and more power. But even during Assyria’s

imperial period in the eighth and seventh century BCE, they still used on occasion some of the traditional titles held by their Old Assyrian forebears, and tablets with loyalty oaths sworn by Assyrian vassals were sealed with the Old Assyrian seal of the “city hall.” The old idea that the true king of Assyria was the god Assur remained alive well into the seventh century BCE.

Assyrian dynastic continuity was nonetheless remarkably strong. With the probable exception of the short-lived reign of the eunuch Sîn-šumu-lišir in 627, the rulers who governed Assyria from the 17th century onwards were apparently all members of one and the same family – they belonged to the so-called Adasi dynasty. Even though there were phases when the power of the king was overshadowed by that of certain high officials, and despite the fact that on various occasions the royal family was plagued by infighting that led, in at least one case, to the killing of the monarch, the prerogative of the ruling house to provide the Assyrian king, enshrined in the Assyrian King List, remained unchallenged for a full millennium.

A long-term analysis of the Assyrian economy reveals a strange mix of continuity and change as well. At first glance, the mercantile system of the Old Assyrian period seems to have little in common with the exploitative “tributary mode of production” that characterized the economy of Assyria’s imperial phase. And yet, the transition may have had its own historical logic: it brings to mind what Marxist economists have written about imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism. In fact, the Assyrian economy never entirely lost its commercial dimensions. Assyrian merchants continued to play an important economic role until the last decades of Assyrian history (see [Chapter 9](#)), and the detailed accounts Neo-Assyrian scribes kept during military campaigns, not only to register plundered goods but also to document the numbers of killed, maimed, or deported enemies, appear like gory late manifestations of the mercantile spirit of Assyria’s early age.

Assyria’s material culture, amidst centuries of artistic and technical innovation, was characterized by certain continuities as well, continuities that helped create a specifically Assyrian identity. To mention a small but telling example, there were certain types of bread that were peculiar to Assyria from Middle Assyrian to Neo-Assyrian times (Postgate 2015).

Assyrian civilization did not unfold in isolation. Throughout its history, it absorbed influences from other regions, which in turn adopted elements of Assyrian culture (see [Chapters 11–16](#)). The sculptures found in mid-third millennium layers in Ashur, for example, were clearly inspired by southern Mesopotamian models.

From early on, Hurrian culture exerted a strong influence on Assyria. The main deity worshipped in Nineveh in the late third millennium was the Hurrian goddess Šauška, who was later identified by the Assyrians as Ištar of Nineveh. The bedchamber of that goddess was known well into the first

millennium BCE under the semi-Hurrian name *būt naḫḫi*. Some Assyrian terms for (military) professions, for example *turtānu* (“Commander-in-Chief”), are Hurrian loanwords. Over time, however, the Assyrians replaced many Hurrian features, especially in the areas of religion, literature, and scholarship, with elements from the more prestigious culture of ancient Babylonia, where a language closely related to Assyrian was spoken. The importation of numerous Babylonian deities and the reshaping of the theology of Assur after the model of the god Enlil of Nippur are among the most prominent examples of this shift. Even Assyrian royal inscriptions were often written in Babylonian language, and Babylonian scholars and exorcists became key advisors to the Assyrian kings. Assyrian hostility towards the Hurrian state of Mittani in the mid-second millennium probably accelerated this process.

In the first millennium BCE, Aramaean culture made a strong impact on Assyria. Aramaeans had begun to move into the Assyrian core area in the wake of the collapse of several major Late Bronze age civilizations around 1200 BCE and continued to arrive there in large numbers as a result of the mass deportations undertaken by various Neo-Assyrian kings. Many Assyrians adopted the Aramaic language and alphabetic script. After the downfall of the Assyrian state in the late seventh century BCE, cuneiform writing in Assyria came to an end, but key elements of Assyrian culture and religion survived among the Aramaeans. Even today, there are groups of Aramaeans who call themselves Assyrians and consider themselves heirs of the Assyrians of the imperial age (see [Chapter 32](#)).

The Assyrians interacted also with other people, among them Hittites, Luwians, Urartians, and Elamites, and adopted elements of their cultures. All in all, they were remarkably open to foreign influences. Neo-Assyrian kings built monumental palace complexes incorporating zoos and gardens as formal showcases for collections of foreign animals, trees, and plants, kept princes from foreign states as hostages in their residences, and embraced with great enthusiasm the artwork and architecture of their neighbors, from delicately carved ivories to monumental art forms and palatial architectural elements such as porticos known among the Neo-Hittite and Aramaean inhabitants of northern Syria as *būt ḫilāni*. At the same time, Assyrian culture had an impact on other civilizations, especially during the first millennium BCE. The Urartians, for example, adopted Assyrian cuneiform writing and remodeled their national god Ḫaldi after the Assyrian god Assur. The olive oil industry in Ekron was, in all likelihood, boosted by the new markets that emerged as a result of the Assyrian domination of the Levant. And some of the new religious ideas articulated in the Biblical book of Deuteronomy can be seen as a response to the political theology underlying the loyalty oaths that Assyrian kings imposed on their subjects and vassals. Unlike other empires, however, Assyria made no attempt to actively promote its language, religion, and

literature outside its core area. The cultural changes effected by Assyrian rule in conquered regions were, as a rule, incidental rather than symptoms of deliberate cultural domination.

Trends in Research on Ancient Assyria and their Ideological Background

As mentioned above, the foundations for the modern study of ancient Assyria were laid in the 1840s and 1850s, when French and British explorers rediscovered the great Assyrian cities Kalḫu, Dur-Šarrukīn, and Nineveh, and the Irish clergyman Edward Hincks and other scholars deciphered the cuneiform writing system (see [Chapter 31](#)). Since then, the scholarly analysis of ancient Assyria has gone through various phases.⁴ Initially, texts and images found at Assyrian sites were first and foremost scrutinized with the goal to assess their bearing on the “sacred history” outlined in the Hebrew Bible, whose reliability as a historical source was partly corroborated and partly invalidated by the new finds. Assyrian references to a number of Israelite and Judean kings known from the Bible confirmed the historical existence of these rulers, but other information retrieved from the Assyrian inscriptions undermined established patterns of Biblical history and chronology (see [Chapter 29](#)).

When, from the 1870s onwards, tablets from Assurbanipal’s Ninevite library were successively translated, additional connections with the Biblical record came to light, including those between the Assyro-Babylonian and Biblical flood stories. In early twentieth-century Germany, these and other discoveries led to the politically charged “Babel–Bibel” dispute, in which the German emperor Wilhelm II intervened in person to condemn claims by some Assyriologists that the apparently derivative character of the Bible challenged the holy book’s status as a source of unquestionable truths.

While nineteenth and early twentieth-century scholars often read Assyrian texts with an eye to their relevance to the Bible, the yardstick for judging Neo-Assyrian art was the sculpture from ancient Greece and Rome. By displaying Neo-Assyrian monuments along with Greek masterpieces like the Parthenon friezes in the British Museum in London and the Louvre in Paris, the cultural elites of the nineteenth-century European imperial powers implicitly endorsed Assyrian civilization – not the least, perhaps, because their own political mission was to some extent comparable to Assyria’s imperial politics (Bohrer 2003). But there were also some critical voices. The famous nineteenth-century cultural historian Jacob Burckhardt, in his *Reflections on History*, derided “the utterly uncouth royal fortresses of Nineveh, [t]he meanness of their ground-plan and the slavishness of their sculptures.” The tension

between an attitude that admired the political and cultural achievements associated with Assyria's empire-building and one that detested the brutality and oppression associated with this endeavor has never entirely ceased to inform the debate about the Neo-Assyrian period (Fales 2010: 27–55).

In the wake of the trauma of World War I, the “critics” of ancient Assyria gained for quite some time the upper hand. A 1918 article by Albert T. Olmstead, an influential American historian of the ancient Near East, compared the atrocities described in Assyrian royal inscriptions to the horrors of the recent war.⁵ But Olmstead was also a representative of a more “historicist” approach to Assyria. Tellingly, his *History of Assyria* from 1923 begins with the statement: “Assyrians deserve to be studied by and for themselves.” Olmstead's book is, incidentally, both the first and, somewhat astoundingly, the last serious attempt by a modern scholar to produce a comprehensive history of ancient Assyria.⁶

In the half-century that followed World War II, scholars focused on preparing new editions of Assyrian texts and other forms of “positivist” research. Where we find value judgments regarding Assyria in their works, these are largely negative. The Danish-American Assyriologist Thorkild Jacobsen, for example, claimed, in his 1976 book *The Treasures of Darkness*, that the first millennium BCE, the period of Assyria's greatest expansion, “contributed no major new insights, rather, it brought in many ways decline and brutalization.”

The past two or three decades have seen Assyriologists continue their traditional editorial work, but also, in the wake of the “cultural turn” of the 1970s, become more interested in Assyria's religious, intellectual, and socio-economic history. Inspired by the new insights thus gained, several scholars, among them Martin West (1997), Stephanie Dalley (1998), and especially Simo Parpola (e.g., 1993), have sought to reestablish a more positive image of ancient Assyria. Possibly influenced by the experience of the vastly amplified global flow of ideas and goods brought about by new technologies and the downfall of communism in the late 1980s, they have stressed that later civilizations were in many ways indebted to Assyrian models, not only politically, but also in religion, literature, and the arts. Even though this “neo-diffusionist” approach has led to a number of contestable claims (for a critique, see, e.g., Cooper 2000), it has served as an important corrective to the largely negative appreciation of Neo-Assyrian civilization that dominated the preceding decades, and it has opened up Assyrian studies to the “global history” approach that has gained traction in recent years (see, for example, Liverani 2011).

The Assyrian Cultural Heritage Crisis

This Introduction cannot end without a word on the current political situation in the region in which Assyrian civilization once thrived. For quite some time now, conditions there have been deplorable, especially in Iraq, where war, unrest, and humanitarian crisis have been steady phenomena since 1980. But at no point in recent history has the state of affairs been worse than at this very juncture. At the time of writing this Introduction, much of the ancient Assyrian heartland is under control of the so-called “Islamic State,” a group that, after taking the city of Mosul in June 2014, began to accompany its atrocities against civilians with a well-publicized campaign of cultural cleansing targeting museums and archaeological sites such as Nineveh and Kalḥu and threatening to destroy significant parts of Assyria’s cultural heritage. Important archaeological complexes such as the throne room suite of Aššurnāṣirpal’s palace in Nimrud and the Nabû temple at the same site, as well as central parts of Sennacherib’s famous Southwest Palace at Nineveh, have been entirely demolished between March 2015 and June 2016.⁷ For everyone interested in ancient Assyria, this is a deeply depressing moment. But it is perhaps also a moment in which the appearance of a *Companion to Assyria* is particularly timely. May the book help to counter the powerful forces that seek, at this very moment, to obliterate Assyria’s rich history and culture.

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Notes

- 1 Pongratz-Leisten 2015 is a recent attempt to analyze in detail Assyrian religion and political ideology in various historical periods. The book appeared too late to be considered by the contributors of this volume.

- 2 For a few remarks on the problems of establishing an exact chronology for Assyrian history, see the “List of Assyrian Kings” at the end of this volume.
- 3 In this volume, we use different orthographies to distinguish between the city, Ashur, and the god, Assur. It should be noted that this distinction is purely conventional and artificial. Both the city and the god had the same name, rendered Aššur in scholarly transliterations.
- 4 The following paragraphs excerpt Frahm 2006, where bibliographical references can be found.
- 5 The article appeared in *The American Historical Review* (for exact references, see Fales 2010, 45–6).
- 6 Mayer 1995 is largely limited to an analysis of the history of Assyrian warfare, and almost exclusively based on the study of Assyrian royal inscription, with other sources receiving only sporadic attention. Saggs 1984 is a popular “cultural history” of Assyria.
- 7 For detailed information on the destruction inflicted by ISIS, see the weekly reports posted online by ASOR’s Syrian Heritage Initiative at <http://www.asor-syrianheritage.org/weekly-reports/> (last accessed 11/15/2016). For some of the author’s thoughts on the crisis and its roots, see Frahm 2015.

PART I
Geography and History

CHAPTER 1

Physical and Cultural Landscapes of Assyria

Jason Ur

Introduction

The history of the land of Assyria is, to a considerable extent, the story of a continuous attempt by individuals, communities, states, and empires to define their places in their landscapes. In basic economic terms, people had to feed their families, which meant adapting to the possibilities and limitations of climate and environment for agriculture and animal husbandry, and sometimes extending them. For the elite elements of society, the environment was a critical variable in how palace walls were decorated, how gardens and parks were created, and how tribute was collected. Climate and environment played important roles in determining the scheduling of royal campaigns and in which directions they went. The limitations and fluctuations of climate were a major concern in religious contexts as well, as priests and kings attempted to intercede with the gods for the favorable growing conditions that sustained cities, enabled trade, and revealed to the people the good relationship between the king and the gods.

The physical landscape of Assyria was far from immutable. Fluctuations in temperature, rainfall, and seasonality took place on yearly, decadal, and even millennial scales. Human communities were responsible for modifications that turned the physical environment into the cultural landscape. The nature of these cultural changes have much to tell us about past societies. At one end of the continuum, landscapes were modified by the aggregate actions of their inhabitants, whether they were farmers, shepherds, craftspeople, or traders. Individuals might have only limited effects on their surroundings within their lifetimes, but their collective actions can leave a tremendous, often unintended, footprint. The best example of such cumulative action is the *tell*, the classic form of archaeological site in the Near East, the largest of which grew to 40 m or higher. Tells formed over centuries or millennia as individual households built, repaired, tore down, and rebuilt stone and mudbrick structures on the same spot (Rosen 1986). The intention of the builders was simply to provide a physical space for their households, not to create a looming aggregate of decayed mud brick on the landscape; the cumulative result of many generations engaging in this simple domestic behavior,

however, had just such an effect.

On the other end of the continuum, landscapes could be modified according to royal will; kings and their planners imposed their particular political, economic, demographic, and cosmological visions upon the surrounding land. The resulting landscape elements were often monumental due to the royal household's ability to mobilize vast amounts of labor toward its ends. These structures are more difficult to remove, and therefore disproportionately likely to survive to the present than lesser changes.

This chapter reviews the physical environment and cultural landscapes, both emergent and imposed, in the regions of modern northern Iraq, southeastern Turkey and eastern Syria that encompass the central part of the ancient "Land of Assyria" (Figure 1.1). Although this geographic designation was only meaningful in the late second and early first millennia BCE, in the time of the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian empires, it provides a convenient geographical framework within which to consider earlier landscapes, especially the Early Bronze Age (EBA) urban phase of the late third millennium BCE. Geographically, this region encompasses the middle stretch of the Tigris River between the Eski Mosul and the Fatha gorge, its tributary valleys and plains to the east, the Cizre plain in the north, and the Upper Khabur and Sinjar plains, as well as the Khabur river valley, to the west. These latter areas, while outside of the Tigris Valley "heartland," were considered by the first millennium BCE Assyrian kings to be historically part of the "Land of Ashur," and were administered as such (Postgate 1992, 1995; Radner 2006; Kühne 2012).

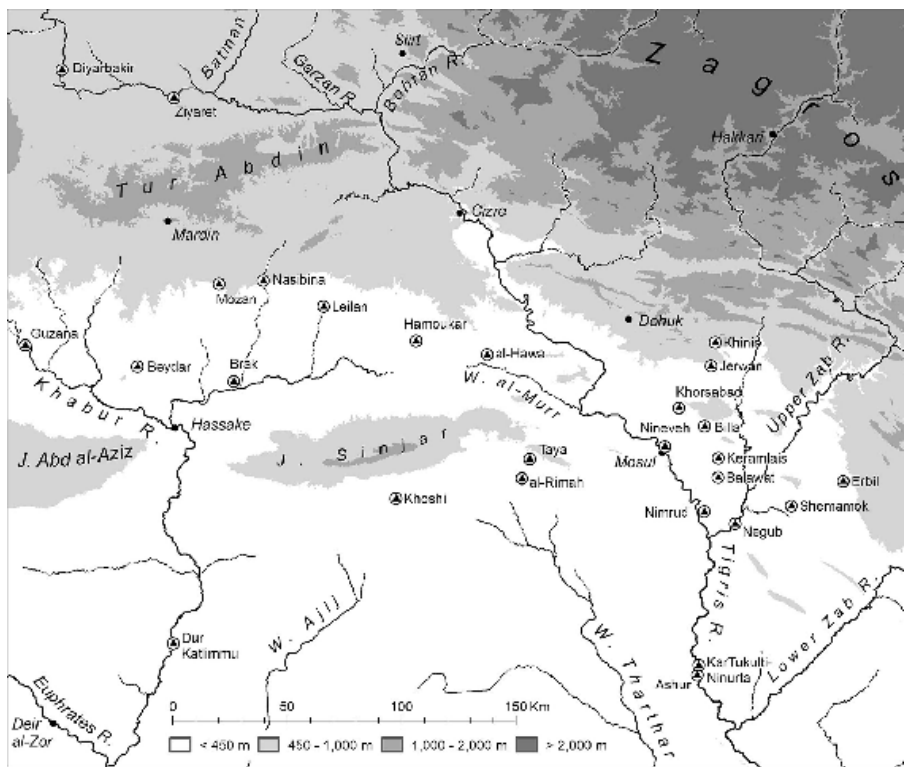


Figure 1.1 Topography, hydrology, and major sites of Assyria (northern Iraq, northeastern Syria, and southeastern Turkey).

A particularly useful framework for approaching Assyrian landscapes through time is the “signature landscape” concept developed by Tony Wilkinson (2003: 11–14). Signature landscapes describe certain combinations of landscape elements that recur across space and time. These landscapes tend to be products of either especially powerful state actors, or of particularly durable and widely shared activities that resulted in the deep etching of a suite of features into the landscape. In both cases, the features survive and sometimes even structure subsequent settlement and land use. Signature landscapes are generally associated with, but not dictated by, combinations of physical environment and social factors (most commonly economy, political structure, and cosmology). Here one might consider the lowland irrigation landscapes of southern Mesopotamia, the oasis-based water catchment systems of the deserts, and the terracing and runoff agricultural systems of highland Yemen. The land of Assyria hosted two distinctive signature landscapes in the Early Bronze Age and Iron Ages under nearly identical environmental conditions, described below. It is thus an excellent case study in the variable connections between cultural landscapes and sociopolitical organization.

The study of cultural landscapes is made challenging by the divergent

histories of scholarship in the eastern (Iraqi) and western (Syrian and Turkish) halves of the Assyrian core. The Assyrian heartland along the Tigris River is one of the birthplaces of the modern discipline of archaeology, due to the efforts of Layard, Botta, and others in the great capital cities of the empire (Larsen 1996). These early excavations produced huge volumes of architectural, art historical, and epigraphic data that are still mined today for new insights. In terms of landscape and settlement studies, however, the hinterlands of the great capitals have been almost terra incognita until very recently. Early landscape observations were anecdotal and opportunistic, but remain unsurpassed forty or more years after they were made (see especially Bachmann 1927; Jacobsen and Lloyd 1935; Oates 1968; Reade 1978). The “golden age” of survey archaeology in southern Iraq in the 1950s and 1960s (e.g., Adams 1981, reviewed in Ur 2013) had almost no impact on research in Assyria, which was characterized by a “closing of perspectives” (Liverani 1988: 80). The western half of the Assyrian core, on the other hand, has witnessed an explosion of surveys and landscape studies since the 1970s (reviewed in Wilkinson and Barbanes 2000; Morandi Bonacossi 2000 and below). At the time of writing, this imbalance in archaeological survey is beginning to be corrected via new projects in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, in particular in the hinterlands of Nineveh, Erbil, and Kilizu (see, e.g., Ur et al. 2013; Ur and Osborne 2016; Morandi Bonacossi 2012–13; Morandi Bonacossi and Iamoni 2015; Kopanias and MacGinnis 2016).

Despite these biases within the overall dataset, it is possible to describe general trends in the evolution of cultural landscapes, although some aspects will require ground confirmation in the future when new projects in Iraq and its Kurdistan Region begin to be published. After describing aspects of the physical environment, this chapter considers one of the most dramatic landscape shifts in the history of the ancient Near East: the transition from the emergent urban landscapes of the late Early Bronze Age (ca. 2600–2000 BCE) to the imposed landscape of imperial Assyria in the early first millennium BCE.

Physical Environment of Assyria

The geological framework of Assyria was born when the Arabian plate impacted the Eurasian plate in the Miocene Epoch, causing the formation of the Taurus and Zagros mountain ranges, as well as the elevation of the Tur Abdin and the Jebels Abd al-Aziz and Sinjar regions (Lovelock 1984). Westerly air masses acquire moisture from the Mediterranean Sea and release it as precipitation across this area. The amount of precipitation is high in the

mountains to the north but diminishes as one moves south into the steppes of Syria and Arabia. In the western part of this region, water flows through the Upper Khabur basin in two perennial streams and, ultimately, into the Euphrates River. The Tigris River receives water from several left bank tributaries, most notably from the Eastern Khabur, Upper Zab, and Lower Zab rivers. The region east of the Tigris River has several other small perennial streams and seasonally flowing drainages (*wadis*) as well.

Geology, climate, and hydrology have combined to form a broad band of productive soils in both the river valleys and across the northern part of Assyria (Buringh 1960: 204–22; Weiss 1986; Courty 1994). To the north, in areas of higher rainfall, the reddish brown soils (Calcic xerosols) are especially fertile. Further south into the dry steppes, the soils have higher gypsum content and are less productive. It is likely that much of this region was originally a grassy parkland with oak and pistachio trees, but millennia of intensive grazing, cultivation, and fuel gathering dramatically impoverished its natural flora (Guest 1966; Deckers and Pessin 2010). The river valleys of the Tigris, Khabur, and their tributaries have particularly rich soils. In southern Mesopotamia, the Tigris and, especially, the Euphrates were easily exploited for broad irrigation because they formed levees. In the Assyrian core of northern Mesopotamia, however, the rivers are incised within narrow valleys, making irrigation challenging and largely restricting it to the adjacent river terraces.

For much of the past four millennia, these conditions may have been similar to those of present-day Iraq. At several points, however, shifts in climate may have had social impacts. Most notably, an abrupt environmental event has been proposed to explain the collapse of the late Early Bronze Age urban phase and the decomposition of several political dynasties in Mesopotamia and beyond (Staubwasser and Weiss 2006, reviewed most recently in Wossink 2009, Danti 2010). An extended dry phase has been implicated in the “dark age” at the end of the Late Bronze Age, a time when formerly cultivated landscapes fell under the control of Aramaean pastoral groups (Neumann and Parpola 1987). Even without such hypothesized events, climate and precipitation fluctuated annually. In some periods, these conditions placed limits on the nature and extent of the settlement landscape, but, in the two periods discussed below in particular, individuals, communities, and polities found ways to overcome them.

Cultural Landscapes: Past Research and Methods

What is known of the landscape of Assyria stems from a century and a half of archaeological observation. In the nineteenth century, early excavators rendered anecdotal impressions of sites and landscape features. These initial

observations have several elements in common. For instance, the archaeologists concentrated on monumental finds, particularly rock-cut reliefs. Although the reports often included detailed and valuable recordings, the interpretations were often flawed or incorrect. Layard, for example, interpreted the aqueduct at Jerwan as a bridge (1853: 215–16) and failed to notice the canalhead structure at Khinis, which was the *raison d'être* of the massive rock relief that received his attention. In addition, these observations were made in the course of opportunistic travel, when the focus of excavation was on the elite palaces in the great capitals. The excavation reports appear almost exclusively in travel narrative form. The great exception is Felix Jones's "Vestiges of Assyria" map series (Jones 1855), which captured many elements of the immediate hinterlands of the great capitals that have long since disappeared.

The quality of observations and the accuracy of interpretation improved in the twentieth century, especially the recording of rock reliefs (Bachmann 1927) and of the remains of monumental irrigation systems (Jacobsen and Lloyd 1935; Safar 1947; Oates 1968; Reade 1978). These pioneering studies explored the relationships between these features, the imperial capitals, and other monumental aspects of the landscape. For example, David Oates (1968) used the physical traces of canals around Nineveh and Nimrud to evaluate population estimates. Julian Reade (1978) perceived a recurring connection between rock reliefs and state sponsored irrigation features, and proposed that Sennacherib's system was primarily an ideological device rather than a functional system.

Although invaluable, these monument-focused studies still cannot be related to patterns of settlement. No systematic settlement surveys have examined the hinterlands of the great capitals or the plains east of the Tigris River (although see now Ur and Osborne 2016; Morandi Bonacossi 2012–13), but several reconnaissances have investigated the western banks on the plain south of the Jebel Sinjar (Lloyd 1938; Reade 1968) and the Wadi Tharthar (Ibrahim 1986).

The situation has dramatically improved, however, in the western half of this region, mostly within the modern states of Turkey and Syria. Starting in the late 1970s, a series of reconnaissances and intensive surveys identified and recorded thousands of archaeological sites on the Cizre plain, the Wadi al-Murr, the upper Khabur basin, and the lower Khabur river valley (see reviews in Morandi Bonacossi 2000; Wilkinson 2000; Wilkinson and Barbanes 2000). Several of these projects have also considered the "off-site" landscape, including features such as canals, field systems, roads, and tracks (Wilkinson 2003: 44–70). The archaeological landscape of western Assyria often must be used to make generalizations for the eastern heartland that have only recently been subjected to fieldwork-based confirmation in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

The most recent research has capitalized on the widespread availability of

remote-sensing datasets. In the decades prior to the first Gulf War, the Iraqi government placed strong restrictions on the use of aerial photographs by foreign researchers. Two recent trends have democratized the research process, however. Imagery from declassified American intelligence satellite programs such as CORONA and HEXAGON is now globally available and inexpensive, and has been used to document ancient communication (Ur 2003, 2010b; Altaweel 2008) and irrigation systems (Ur 2005; Altaweel 2008; Ur and Reade 2015). More recent multispectral satellite imagery and topographic data can also detect sites and landscape features (Altaweel 2005; Menze et al. 2006; Menze and Ur 2012); these images are free or available at low cost to academic researchers. In some cases, it is possible to interpret these images with reference to the ground observations of earlier archaeologists, but much of the remotely sensed work will still require field confirmation in the future.

Over the past 150 years, these methods have produced a broad dataset concerning settlement and landscape in the land of Assyria. At two periods in particular, the inhabitants of these lands created vivid but very different cultural landscapes: the later Early Bronze Age (ca. 2600–2000 BCE) and the Iron Age (ca. 1000–600 BCE).

Emergent Landscapes of the Early Bronze Age

The most prominent feature of Near Eastern cultural landscapes is the mound (variously *tell*, *tepe*, or *höyük*). Mounds are the cumulative result of centuries or even millennia of sedentary inhabitation using predominantly mud brick architecture. In the Neolithic Period, settlements were small and transitory, with occupation generally lasting only a few generations before communities relocated. This pattern lasted until the Ubaid Period, when settlements became more permanent and the resulting settlement mounds began to reach considerable heights (Akkermans and Schwartz 2003: 159–60). Throughout this early phase, communities split before growing demographically large, and, consequently, sites were small. Most experiments in settlement agglomeration appear not to have been durable, such as the extensive settlement at Khirbat al-Fakhar (Al-Quntar et al. 2011).

In the Ubaid Period, communities developed a durable spatial mindset on the proper way to settle: in a nucleated form, over a long term, and preferably set atop a pre-existing mound, whether continuously occupied or not. One factor in this shift must have been economic: the emergence of widely-recognized rules for land tenure, whether at the household or the community level, to regulate how the settlement's agricultural and pastoral resources were

managed and transferred. Settlement stability was not, however, entirely economically motivated; it is likely that generalized and shared cultural attitudes about settlement had developed. Such attitudes were responsible for individuals and groups choosing to remain on tells, or selecting abandoned ones for the location of new settlements. This general mindset underlaid specific meanings and significance that were attributed to individual places, now lost to us in the absence of written records. The new spatial mentality appears to have been strongest in the late third millennium BCE, when almost all settlement occurred atop tells, and then to have broken down over the course of the second millennium BCE, finally replaced in the Iron Age with a radically different spatial logic (see below).

The pattern of tells changed radically in the middle of the third millennium BCE, when a series of large settlements formed across the northern arc of the Fertile Crescent. This settlement landscape included new forms of land use that left a remarkably deep imprint on the landscape. This process was not the region's first steps toward urbanism; Tell Brak had already coalesced into a 130-hectare city by the middle of the fourth millennium (Ur et al. 2007, 2011). But while Tell Brak, and Khirbat al-Fakhar before it, were isolated phenomena, urbanism in the Early Bronze Age was widespread throughout northern Mesopotamia.

The most prominent elements of this demographic shift were a series of spatially extensive, densely occupied settlements that ranged up to 120 hectares in size. Most of these cities expanded from already ancient tells to include broad lower towns. For example, at Hamoukar, a 15-hectare tell dated to the fourth millennium was resettled around 2600 BCE, and a 90-hectare lower town to its south was settled; within this area, 98 hectares were occupied between ca. 2600–2000 BCE (Ur 2010b: 104–9). Similar growth patterns occurred at Tell Mozan, Tell Leilan, Tell al-Hawa, Tell Taya, Tell Khoshi, and Tell Baqra, all of which expanded in excess of 60 hectares. Population estimation is a particularly uncertain science (Postgate 1994), but the largest of these cities may have been home to 10,000 to 15,000 persons. Excavations at these sites revealed remarkable concentrations of political and economic power: monumental temple and palace institutions, writing and administrative technologies, craft specialization and mass production, and considerable disparities in status and wealth (recently reviewed in Stein 2004; Ur 2010a; Matney 2012).

In some regions, the urbanization process took place at the expense of settlements in the hinterland. In the Wadi al-Murr, for example, the urbanization of Tell al-Hawa could be explained entirely by the abandonment of villages in its hinterland; site numbers were reduced, but the total settled hectares remained roughly constant (Wilkinson and Tucker 1995: 50–3). Elsewhere, the appearance of towns and cities included growth in both site numbers and total settled hectares (for example, around Hamoukar and Tell

Beydar; Ur 2010b: 104–9; Ur and Wilkinson 2008: 307–8). In these cases, Early Bronze Age cities probably benefited from immigration or nomadic sedentarization.

The enormous pressures that this urban settlement system placed on its landscape resulted in dramatic transformations visible even today in the archaeological landscape. The necessity of feeding large urban populations placed strains on the traditional dry-farming based agro-pastoral economy, with two main effects. Settlements chose to extensify cultivation by bringing more land under the plow. This process can be documented in the landscape via shallow linear features that represent the remains of ancient trackways (Wilkinson 1993; Ur 2003). These tracks are mostly invisible on the ground, but can be mapped using aerial and satellite photographs. They are overwhelmingly associated with sites of the Early Bronze Age urban phase across northern Mesopotamia (Ur and Wilkinson 2008: 310–11). They also occur in northern Iraq, where dating them is complicated by a lack of archaeological surveys (Altaweel 2008: 65–9; Ur et al. 2013). These tracks became depressed as farmers, shepherds, and their animals traveled through cultivated land, where their movements were constrained by fields on either side. Where land was uncultivated, movement was unrestricted, and depressed tracks did not form; hence, the presence of tracks is a proxy indicator for the presence of fields (Wilkinson 1994).

Another response of farmers was to intensify, by introducing nutrients into the soil via manuring. Organic refuse was collected along with other domestic debris and composted in settlements to be spread out upon the fields later. What remains of this practice in the landscape are the incidental bits of inorganic debris, which have been kept in the topsoil by millennia of succeeding agriculture (Wilkinson 2003: 117–18). The landscapes surrounding the cities of Hamoukar (98 ha), Brak/Nagar (70 ha), and Tell al-Hawa (66 ha) have dense scatters of potsherds, which are the surviving evidence of intensive agriculture in their immediate hinterlands (Wilkinson and Tucker 1995: 19–23, Ur 2010b: 65–76, Ur et al. 2011, Ur 2015).

Together, radial trackways and manure zones describe inner intensive and outer extensive zones of cultivation that reach their greatest extent around the large cities. They are not, however, limited to large cities; smaller radial systems and manure zones are found around towns and even small villages of only a few hectares. In the Beydar region, small villages may have been cultivating at a rate in excess of the needs of their estimated population, and possibly even to an extent greater than the villagers could have undertaken themselves, which raises interesting questions of labor mobility (Ur and Wilkinson 2008: 313–15).

Pastoralism was also important, although it is more difficult to quantify spatially. The increased cultivation of barley around these cities and towns may have been for animal consumption as fodder (Charles and Bogaard 2001:

319). Fodder production would also explain why many settlements appear to have been cultivating far more land than their estimated human populations would have required. The conversion of former pasture areas between settlements into cultivated land therefore may have been offset by an increased emphasis on settlement-based flocks.

The Early Bronze Age cultural landscape was thus a very full one, modified extensively by human communities. Sedentism and settlement nucleation reached unprecedented levels not to be seen again until the Neo-Assyrian Period (and, even then, only in a few political capitals; see below). The agro-pastoral economies of these urban settlement systems operated at high intensity, as farmers brought outlying territory under the plow and attempted to enhance the yields of already-cultivated lands closer to their settlements.

Despite the intensive and potentially overextended agricultural economy, and the monumentality of settlements and landscapes, we should not assume that the hand of a centralized administration lay behind these developments. Monumental palace and temple complexes did exist, but there is no evidence that they managed or inspired this expansion of agricultural production, or that they coerced people to nucleate at urban sites. There is no unequivocal evidence, for example, for centralized storage of cereals or animals (Ur and Colantoni 2010). The trackways, over 6000 kilometers of which have been recorded in northeastern Syria alone, are not part of planned communication routes, but rather emerged through the uncoordinated but purposeful actions of farmers, shepherds, and their animals. The motivation for agricultural intensification must be sought at the household level, possibly as new commensal strategies assumed central importance for creating and maintaining social relationships (Ur 2009). The Early Bronze Age urban landscape appears to have been the unplanned result of widespread rules and attitudes about land tenure, household based surplus production, and the social roles of communal meals.

Further evidence comes from the patterns of movement revealed by the preserved trackways. Most simply radiate outward from settlements and fade out beyond the fields, but some connect with trackways radiating from nearby settlements to create networks (Figure 1.2). In no cases were there direct tracks between cities, or between capitals and subsidiary towns (e.g., between Brak and Beydar). Movement through the landscape, even that of political elites, respected local systems of agriculture and land tenure (Sallaberger and Ur 2004).

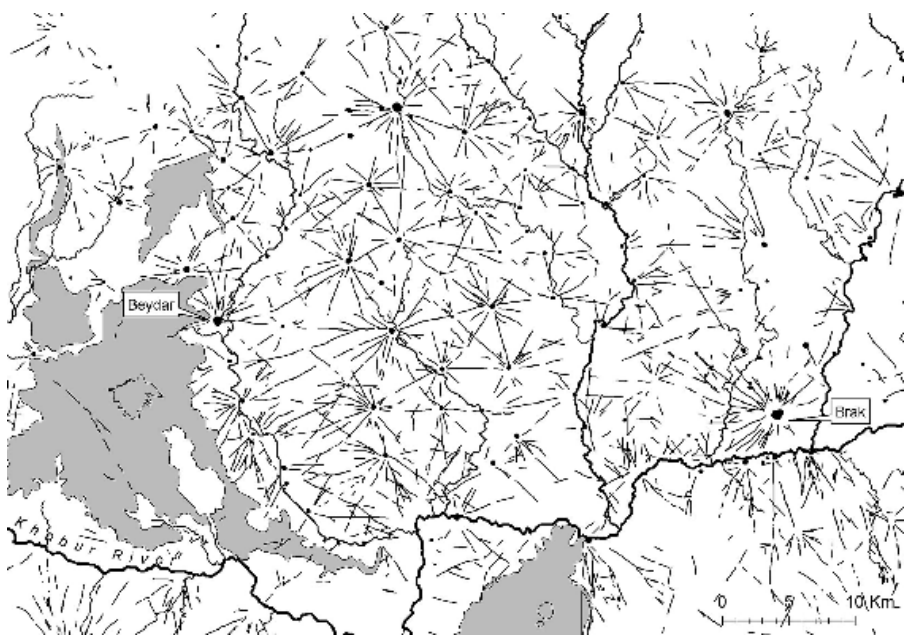


Figure 1.2 EBA sites and linear trackways in the region of Tell Brak and Tell Beydar (based on Ur 2010b Map 3).

This emergent landscape was potentially unsustainable, however; the combination of high population density, urban nucleation, intensive agriculture, and variable climate placed these settlement systems at high risk of collapse. Agent-based computer modeling suggests that villages and towns could survive most droughts (Wilkinson et al. 2007: 65–6), but large population centers were especially vulnerable. Large cities could be sustained under normal conditions of climatic variation if their neighboring towns and villages could be convinced or coerced to contribute agricultural surplus, but, in the face of multi-year droughts, this overextended system was liable to collapse (Wilkinson 1994). Initially, it was proposed that urbanism and political entities had collapsed on account of an abrupt aridification event, variously attributed to volcanoes, meteorites, or global changes in atmospheric circulation (Staubwasser and Weiss 2006; Weiss et al. 1993). This model has been critiqued in recent years in favor of new models that recognize variation in local settlement trajectories (Kuzucuoğlu and Marro 2007; Wossink 2009; Danti 2010; Ur 2015).

Imperial Landscapes of the Neo-Assyrian Period

By the start of the seventh century BCE, the landscape of northern Mesopotamia had been transformed in ways that would have rendered it unrecognizable to an Early Bronze Age urban dweller. At the most basic

level, the settlement landscape of cities, towns, and villages with broad catchments of intensively cultivated fields between them had disappeared. In its place was a nearly even distribution of small villages or hamlets. On the other hand, a handful of cities had grown to tremendous sizes. The walls of Nineveh, for example, could contain seven of the largest Early Bronze Age cities. With the shift towards larger cities, the Assyrian cultural landscape set a pattern that would become typical for the great empires that succeeded it (Wilkinson and Rayne 2010; Adams 2005).

This transition unfolded in the second millennium, after all of the great Early Bronze Age cities were either abandoned (e.g., Leilan and Hamoukar) or substantially transformed (e.g., Tell Brak). The descendants of the former urbanites now migrated with their animals as part of a pastoral lifestyle that is well documented in the Mari tablets (Fleming 2004; Durand 2004) but exceedingly difficult to discern in the archaeological record (Lyonnet 1996). Cities of the Middle Bronze Age in northern Mesopotamia were fewer and uniformly smaller than their Early Bronze Age predecessors. The memory of the earlier cities remained, and many were deliberately resettled and even refortified, but urban populations never regained their former density. At Tell Leilan, for instance, the lower town was largely “hollow” and therefore presented a blank slate upon which royal palaces and other large institutions could be inscribed (Ristvet 2008 fig. 3). Late Bronze Age (Mitanni and Middle Assyrian) cities were also small and infrequent, with the notable exception of Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta, a 500 ha planned city that hinted at the future direction of urban settlement (Dittman 1990). A variable pattern of ruralization describes most of the western part of the region, with some isolated Late Bronze Age towns and cities (Ristvet 2008; Wilkinson 2002; Szuchman 2009; Ur 2010b: 157–160); no comparable systematic data exists for the Assyrian core along the Tigris River, however.

The settlement landscape of the early first millennium BCE was dominated by the great capital cities. The original political capital and enduring religious center was the old city of Ashur, which, at 70 ha, was within the range of Early Bronze Age urban sites. The political center moved to a series of increasingly large new foundations: Aššurnāṣirpal II founded the city of Kalḫu (Nimrud; 360 ha); Sargon II founded Dur-Šarrukin (305 ha); Sennacherib expanded Nineveh to 750 ha (Stronach 1994; Oates and Oates 2001). These planned imperial capitals were three to seven times larger than even the most populous cities of the Early Bronze Age, and would have required a much larger agricultural catchment to sustain them (for Nineveh, see Wilkinson 2003: 128–30). The provincial capitals were also large, but well within the range of Early Bronze Age urban sites (e.g., Dur-Katlimmu at 110 ha; Tušḫan at 35 ha; Kühne 2011; Matney et al. 2011).

These great urban centers dominate archaeological discussion because of their excavation histories and their artifacts, which presently fill the world’s great

national and imperial museums. These cities were, however, few and far between. The Assyrian countryside was remarkably rural, especially when compared to the Early Bronze Age urban phase. Early reconnaissances failed to notice this dispersal because they focused on high mounds, the quintessential and most easily recognizable site form. Recent full-coverage systematic survey across Iraq, southeastern Turkey, and northeastern Syria has revealed a fully settled Neo-Assyrian landscape of small towns, villages, and farmsteads. Most of these settlements were small (two hectares or less) and are now low mounds, on the order of one to two meters high. When earlier sites were resettled, it tended to be on a reduced scale; for example, a three-hectare village appeared on the northeastern corner of Hamoukar's massive Early Bronze Age lower town, and a one-hectare farmstead sat on the northern fringe of Brak's 130 ha fourth millennium city (Ur 2010b: 112–14; Ur et al. 2011). In some cases, isolated temple structures appear to have been erected by the state within the ruins of former cities, for example at Tell al-Rimah and Tell al-Hawa (Wilkinson and Tucker 1995: 61). Assyrian towns emerged as extensive low mounds in the shadows of older mounds, and, consequently, have been largely overlooked by archaeologists, who have favored excavations at tell summits (Wilkinson et al. 2004).

The rural pattern of Assyrian settlement was remarkably widespread. On a regional scale, the filling of the landscape has been demonstrated almost everywhere that systematic observations have been made (reviewed in Morandi Bonacossi 2000, Wilkinson and Barbanes 2000, Wilkinson et al. 2005). The Neo-Assyrian period saw the greatest expansion, in terms of the number of sites, as demonstrated by surveys around Tell al-Hawa, Hamoukar, Tell Brak, Tell Beydar, and Erbil ([Figure 1.3](#); Wilkinson and Barbanes 2000; Wright et al. 2006–07: 13; Ur 2010b; Ur and Osborne 2016). The Cizre plain, the last major alluvial plain upstream from the Assyrian capitals, experienced an identical settlement expansion (Parker 2001), as did the lower Khabur valley (Morandi Bonacossi 1996; Kühne 2010).



Figure 1.3 The evolution from nucleated to dispersed settlement in the Hamoukar and North Jazira Project areas (based on data from Wilkinson and Tucker 1995, Ur 2010b). A. Urban settlement and trackways in the later EBA, ca. 2600–2000 BCE; B. Rural settlement in the Iron Age (early 1st millennium BCE).

The evolution of the Assyrian settlement landscape occurred in three primary ways. As described above, major sites of the Bronze Age were resettled, although almost always at a much more modest scale. Furthermore, the “vacant” spaces in between these earlier settlements were filled in, in a manner that suggests a conscious attention to the interfaces of the former settlements’ catchments. Such infilling is well demonstrated for the Wadi al-Murr (Wilkinson 1995: 145–7) and the region of Tell Beydar (Wilkinson et al. 2005 fig. 12). Finally, lands previously considered too marginal for agriculture were now heavily settled. In the Early Bronze Age, most such

lands would have been considered too dry for cultivation and better used as a pastoral resource, whereas, under Assyrian control, they were filled with nearly the same continuous scatter of small settlements as the wetter plains. The lower stretches of the Khabur River, near its junction with the Euphrates River, had been sparsely settled below Dur-Katlimmu throughout the second millennium, but experienced a remarkable expansion in occupation in the eighth century (Kühne 1995; Morandi Bonacossi 1996). Simultaneously, the steppe around the Wadi Ajij, a region that presently has less than 200 mm of rainfall annually, underwent an explosion of village settlement (Bernbeck 1993; Kühne 2010), as did the steppe around the Jebel Abd al-Aziz (Hole and Kouchoukos, in press). The steppe around Hatra likely experienced a similar expansion (Ibrahim 1986).

The demographic transition was accompanied by, and probably closely related to, a dramatic interference in the natural hydrology. Neo-Assyrian kings paired the construction of new capitals with the excavation of massive irrigation systems that would bring water to their hinterlands (Figure 1.4), and would irrigate a broad expanse of Assyria that had previously been subjected to the vagaries of rainfall (extensively reviewed in Bagg 2000). The Assyrian kings boasted about their irrigation projects prominently in royal inscriptions, some of which were inscribed on or adjacent to the irrigation systems themselves, allowing for an approximation of the chronology.

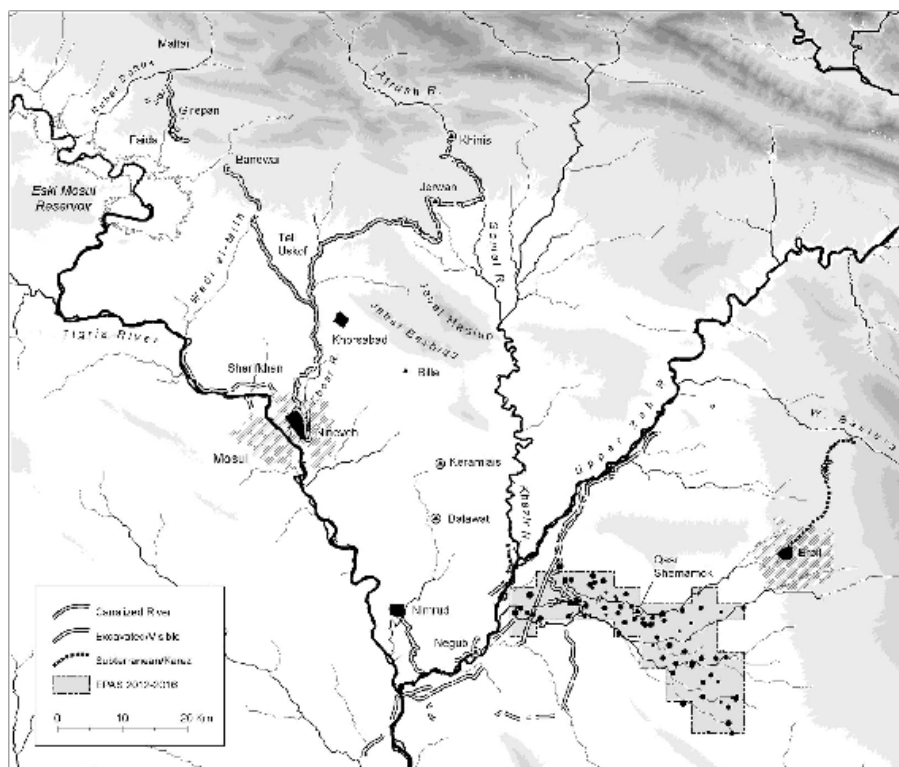


Figure 1.4 Sites, canals, and other features in the Assyrian imperial core.

The first canals constructed under royal impetus appeared in river valleys already in the Late Bronze Age, in association with Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta and Ashur in the heartland of the Tigris Valley (Bagg 2000), and possibly also along the lower Khabur River (Ergenzinger et al. 1988, Kühne 2012). New systems were created in the ninth to early seventh centuries alongside the new capitals and the deliberate deportation of captured populations into the cities and their hinterlands (Oded 1979). The canals that are best documented with regard to the textual and archaeological record are the construction projects attributed to Aššurnāšīrpal II (884–59 BCE) and, especially, to Sennacherib (704–681 BCE). The fields surrounding the new capital at Kalḫu (Nimrud), although the city itself was constructed on a terrace of the Tigris River, were irrigated with water from either the Upper Zab or its right bank tributary the Khazir River (Oates 1968; Davey 1985; Ur and Reade 2015). This 35 kilometer canal, which was called the *patti ḥegalli*, followed the right bank of the Lower Zab until the river approached its confluence with the Tigris River, at which point the canal turned north to the city. Most of the canal's course was open, but at one place its engineers tunneled through a rocky outcrop to maintain the canal's gradient (Davey 1985).

Sennacherib was the most prolific canal builder of the Neo-Assyrian kings and claimed to have ordered the construction of a vast array of canals throughout the northern hinterland of his new capital at Nineveh, which remade a large percentage of the hydrology of northern Assyria (Bagg 2000; Oates 1968; Reade 1978; Ur 2005). The canals were dug in four increasingly ambitious phases (Reade 2000, 2002). The first was the Kisiri canal on the Khosr River, which involved the excavation of 13.4 kilometers of canals immediately upstream from Nineveh. The second phase watered the plain east of the city, but has not yet been located by archaeologists. The third phase, which focused on the northwest, and the fourth phase, which was aimed to the northeast, were massive undertakings. The third phase, called the “Northern System” included a chain of canals that tapped rivers and springs along the foothill fringes from Maltai near Dohuk to Tell Uskof. While not all of these canals were interconnected, the last two canals on this chain redirected some or all of the upper courses of the Wadi Bandwai and the Wadi al-Milah and transferred them into the Khosr River, where they could flow to Nineveh (Ur 2005; Morandi Bonacossi 2012–13; Morandi Bonacossi and Iamoni 2015). The excavated length of these canals is just under 25 kilometers, but three of them involved the excavation of 100 meter-wide earthworks through watersheds, which were up to 20 meters deep in some places.

The fourth phase system extended from a weir on the Gomel River at Khinis, where it is associated with Sennacherib's inscriptions and reliefs (Bachmann 1927; Jacobsen and Lloyd 1935; Fales and del Fabbro 2012–13). This system flowed through 55 kilometers of excavated canals before adding its water into

a tributary of the Khosr. Along its course, the water passed over a stone-built aqueduct at Jerwan (Jacobsen and Lloyd 1935). The Jerwan aqueduct was constructed with an estimated half million cut stone blocks and included several short inscriptions naming Sennacherib as its mastermind as well as mentioning several elements of the surrounding landscape.

The imperial capitals were not the only beneficiaries of imperial canal construction. Sennacherib also commissioned a system that redirected water over 22 kilometers from the Wadi Bastura to the outskirts of Erbil (Safar 1947; Ur et al. 2013: 104–6). Unlike Sennacherib's other canals, the Bastura canal was largely subterranean, and was accessible via vertical shafts at 42 meter intervals. In the eastern provinces, long canals watered the river terraces on both sides of the lower Khabur River, although these constructions have not yet been attributed to a particular Assyrian ruler (Ergenzinger et al. 1988).

Imposed water features served multiple purposes. Of particular importance was their basic economic function: to raise crop yields and to lower the risks that are inherent in rain-fed farming. Economic factors have been downplayed in previous studies, which have emphasized the ideological role of the system (e.g., Bagg 2000; Oates 1968; Reade 1978), but evidence from remote sensing shows that offtakes from these canals were found throughout the system, and would have provided local irrigation water at substantial distances from Nineveh, for example in the regions of Girepan and Jerwan (Ur 2005: 341–2). A transportation function has also been proposed (Ur and Reade 2015). These irrigation canals would have been critical for sustaining cities that had far outstripped the demographic thresholds of the Bronze Age (e.g., Wilkinson 1994).

The canals must, however, be seen as part of an ideological transformation of the landscape of Assyria in order to imprint upon it the power of the Assyrian kings and their divine legitimacy. No rural farmer, whether he was a native Assyrian or a forcibly transplanted Aramaean or Babylonian, could have failed to recognize the awesome power of a king who could redirect rivers and could recreate conquered landscapes in his own country (Ur 2005: 342; Wilkinson et al. 2005: 50). This ideological connection was made explicit with inscriptions and reliefs associated with, or inscribed upon, many of these canals' features. Most famous is perhaps the series of reliefs associated with the weir at Khinis, including the so-called "Bavian inscription," wherein Sennacherib gives his most lengthy description of his irrigation constructions, along with information about other events in his reign. Most importantly, the associated monumental relief ([Figure 1.5](#)) shows Sennacherib standing before Assur and Mullissu, who bestow upon him the symbols of kingship. The iconographic message is that this canal was constructed by the divinely-installed Assyrian ruler. Similar depictions of the Assyrian king and the gods occur in association with canals at Maltai, Bandwai, and especially Faida, where the reliefs are immediately adjacent to a sluice, inescapably visible to

the farmer who draws water out of the canal and down onto his fields (Reade 1978).

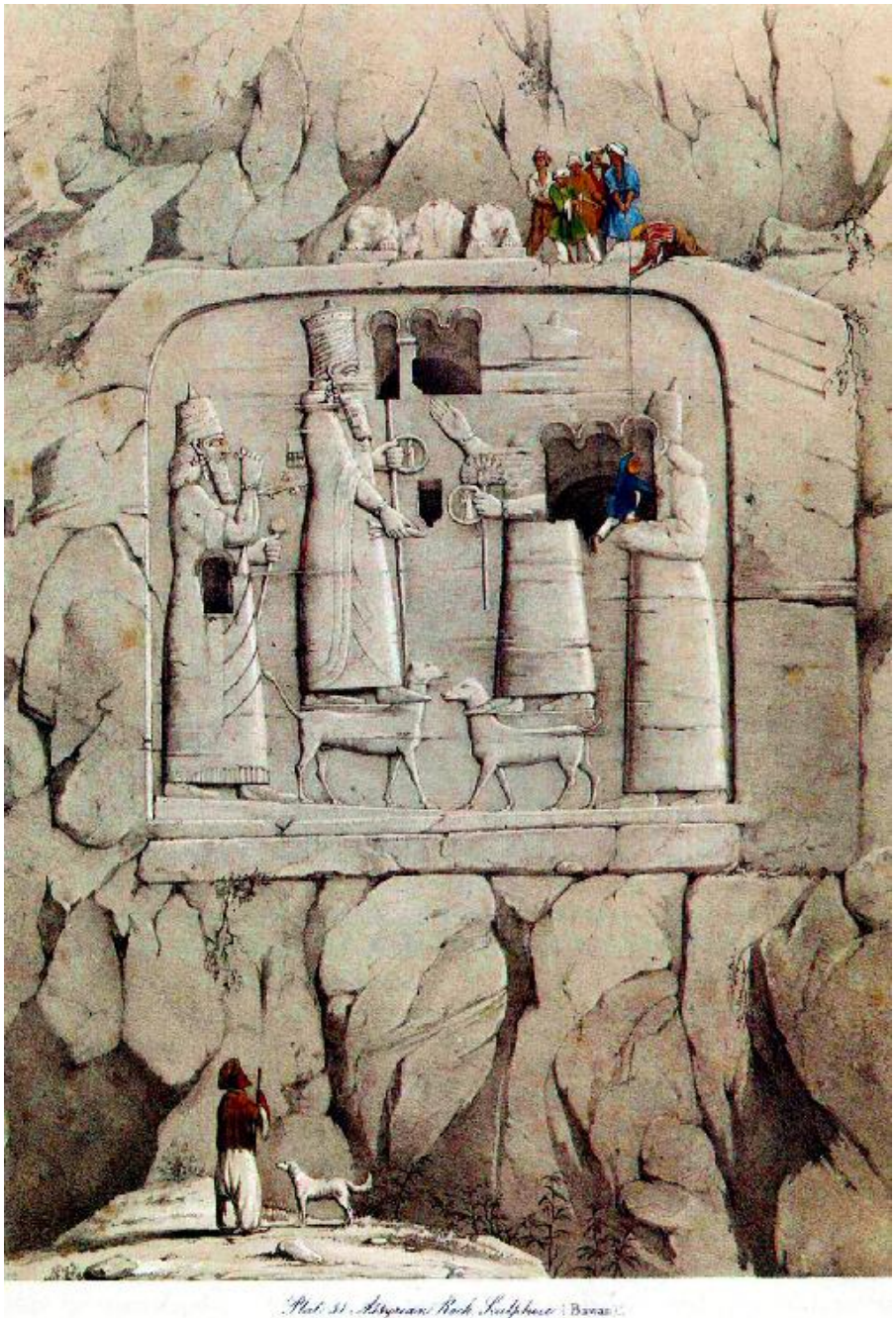


Figure 1.5 Austen Henry Layard exploring Sennacherib's monumental relief at Khinis, as depicted by Frederick Cooper.

The Assyrian landscape was crossed not only by water but also by human

movement. It can be assumed that localized movement took a form similar to the radial patterning of the Early Bronze Age, as described above, although few such systems can be dated unambiguously to the Iron Age. Some linear features have been captured on satellite photographs around Nineveh and Ashur (Wilkinson et al. 2005: 32–7; Altaweel 2008), but most evidence comes from textual sources, which describe “royal roads” (variously transliterated as *ḥarrān šarri* or *ḥūl šarri*) between the Assyrian capitals and the major administrative towns of the provinces (Fales 1990: 98–9; Kessler 1997; Graf 1994: 171–2). Despite the use of the term “road” in English translations, there are few indications that these features were constructed or planned. Most probably, they were tracks that hosted royally maintained way stations (*bīt mardēti*) along them.

Many aspects of this imperial landscape were tied closely to the royal dynasty and appear to have disintegrated almost immediately upon its collapse in the late seventh century. The capitals were so thoroughly vacated that they had largely disappeared from memory only a few centuries later. Most of the small villages and hamlets were abandoned, and, thus, the extensive agricultural settlement pattern also dissolved. Emerging modeling results suggest that the dispersed rural settlement pattern may not have been viable from a long-term ecological perspective (M. Altaweel, personal communication), and so, in the absence of Persian or Babylonian royal coercion, rural villagers may have had both social and economic cause to abandon their settlements. With the de-urbanization of the capitals and the apparent abandonment of the countryside, the Median and Babylonian conquerors had little interest in maintaining the major irrigation works. They did, however, choose to maintain the network of “royal roads,” which was the basis for the Achaemenid system (Graf 1994).

Unlike the Early Bronze Age cultural landscape, which emerged without central planning, the Assyrian landscape was, to a great extent, the intended product of imperial decision makers. Many elements were planned and imposed in a top-down manner, reflecting underlying visions of the proper way for humans to inhabit their world (Wilkinson et al. 2005). The Assyrian landscape often incorporated elements that had long been in existence, most notably settlements such as Ashur and Erbil, which had ancient populations and long-standing religious and political significance. New capital cities and the extensive rural settlements were imposed atop and surrounding existing landscape features, the growth of which cannot be explained by natural demographic growth or settlement fission. Rather, both cities and countryside appear to have been forcibly settled by captured and deported populations from elsewhere in the empire, a practice that is well documented in royal inscriptions and letters (Oded 1979: 366–9; Morandi Bonacossi 2000; Wilkinson et al. 2005). In the case of the lower Khabur and adjacent Wadi Ajijj, for example, it is likely that the expansion of rural sites can be related to

Adad-nirari III's deliberate colonization program described on the stele found at Tell al-Rimah (Page 1968; Morandi Bonacossi 2000; Kühne 2010).

Contributing to this process was the increasingly sedentary nature of Aramaean pastoral nomadic groups (Wilkinson and Barbanes 2000). For example, Adad-nirari II's account of his campaign across the Upper Khabur plain to Nisibin and Guzana includes many hints at the nomadic past of their kings, mentioning almost no settlement elsewhere on the plain (Postgate 1974: 234–7). Given the abundant and extensive settlement pattern revealed by archaeological survey (described above), it is likely that these nomads were settled coercively on their former winter pasturelands and compelled to adopt an agricultural lifestyle by the Assyrian conquest.

It cannot be assumed that all kings shared the same vision for the landscape. No king ever left a comprehensive treatise on the subject (Radner 2000: 233), although non-textual iconographic clues appear repeatedly throughout Neo-Assyrian royal art (Winter 2003). Common characteristics emerge, however, over several centuries of Assyrian imperial control: the construction of walled cities of great spatial extent; population expansion not by natural demographic growth but by the physical emplacement of conquered groups; an evenly settled and agriculturally productive countryside, also populated via forced settlement of captured peoples; the labor-intensive reworking of Assyria's natural hydrology to sustain cities and their agricultural hinterlands; and the dispersal of the symbols of royal power and its divine legitimacy through a program of monumental relief carving.

The origins of the Assyrian landscape vision may have come, at least in part, from emulation. When Aššurnāṣirpal II commissioned the creation of a new capital at Nimrud, large walled cities had been in existence in northern Mesopotamia for over a millennium, but were subject to a certain demographic carrying capacity imposed by the environment and socio-technical limitations (Wilkinson 1994). Instead, Assyrian kings probably looked to the south, as they had for centuries. Since the late fourth millennium BCE, the plains of southern Mesopotamia had been characterized by cities hundreds of hectares in scale, densely populated, and surrounded by rich agricultural lands whose productivity was enhanced with elaborate systems of irrigation. Emulative aspects of the Assyrian landscape vision could also be specific. For example, Sargon II and Sennacherib commissioned replicas of north Syrian and Babylonian landscapes in their respective capital cities, including the simulation of marsh conditions and the importation of botanical samples (Brinkman 1995: 28–9; Radner 2000: 239–40; Thomason 2001).

Conclusions and Future Prospects

The transition from the Early Bronze Age landscape to the Iron Age landscape in the land of Assyria represents a dramatic shift between two particularly clear signature landscapes, each on opposite ends of a continuum between emergent and imposed landscapes. Despite clear evidence of centralized political authority and socioeconomic inequality, the cities of the Early Bronze Age have very few unambiguous signs of planning. Likewise, the simultaneously intensive and extensive agricultural system undergirding them bears no direct evidence of royal or any other form of coercion in its formation. Rather, it appears that both were largely an emergent result of widely held rules and values concerning household subsistence, land tenure, patterns of movement and communication, and spatial patterning. Centralized authorities did not impose urbanization, trackway patterning, and agricultural intensification, although they may have benefited from these processes. The Early Bronze Age model developed to its greatest extent in the second half of the third millennium BCE, but had its origins in durable and nucleated agricultural patterns of settlement that extended back to the fifth millennium BCE (Wilkinson 2003: 105–9).

The Neo-Assyrian landscape of the ninth to seventh centuries BCE developed in an almost identical physical environment in terms of soils, hydrology, and climate. Nonetheless, the Neo-Assyrian model presented a dramatically different signature, and shows many indications of being deliberately imposed by centralized planners, likely on the basis of a singular vision of the proper form of the Assyrian landscape.

These two signature landscapes, one largely emergent and one largely imposed, both proved to be fragile and ultimately unsustainable. In the case of Early Bronze Age urbanism, the largest settlements grew to scales beyond what the environment and the subsistence economy of the time could sustain in the long term, despite economic adaptations toward expanding and intensifying production; only a few of the largest settlements survived more than a half millennium in an urbanized state. The Assyrian Empire developed technological and social means to overcome earlier urban demographic limits (irrigation, water transport, the efficient spatial distribution of agricultural labor, and a quasi-monetary economy), but the Assyrian cultural landscape dissolved nonetheless, coincidentally (it would seem) with the political collapse of the empire. In this case, the shared values and motivations of the sort that had enabled the emergence of the Early Bronze Age landscape were missing. The citizens of Neo-Assyrian cities and their hinterlands did not necessarily share the landscape vision that had been imposed on them, many of them having been brought against their will from their homelands in Babylonia, Judah, and elsewhere, or forcibly settled on their former pasturelands (Yoffee 1988). The Assyrian landscape was unsustainable not because of environmental limitations but because the imperial authorities and the bulk of the population did not share common identities, values, and ideas

about what the land of Assyria should look like.

In archaeology, conclusions are rarely final, but rather are (or should be) the best that can be drawn from the incomplete dataset at hand. The conclusions regarding the evolution of the Assyrian landscape presented in this paper represent generalizations based upon a particularly uneven archaeological record. In particular, the divergent histories of scholarship within the Republic of Iraq on the one hand, and in the Syrian and Turkish Republics on the other, mean that many conclusions drawn on extensive data from the latter two nations must be extrapolated to far less vigorous data from the first. The degree to which urban dwellers at Early Bronze Age sites currently in Iraq (especially at Tell Khoshi, Tell Taya, and Tell Baqrta) modified the hinterlands of their cities is a subject for future research. The same can be said about the nature of Neo-Assyrian rural settlement and land use in the imperial core along the Tigris River, which is currently modeled from urban and irrigation data from excavation and remote sensing in Iraq and from rural settlement data from Syria and Turkey (although see now Ur et al. 2013; Ur and Osborne 2016; Morandi Bonacossi 2012–13).

These conclusions should be taken as points of departure for further testing, rather than as established facts. At the time of writing, there is at least some reason for some optimism, as a new generation of Iraqi scholars of ancient landscapes is emerging (e.g., Al-Hamdani 2008) and foreign research is resuming in the Kurdistan Region (Mühl 2010; Ur et al. 2013). Remote sensing analyses employing CORONA and more recent satellite imagery have revealed a vast array of sites and landscape features in northern Iraq (e.g., Altaweel 2008) that are only just recently receiving systematic study in the field using the new methods that have been developed in Syria and Turkey over the last two decades. If sociopolitical stability, governmental priorities for cultural heritage, and archaeological research agendas can coincide, northern Iraq may yet see its golden age of landscape archaeology.

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Further Reading

A comprehensive overview of landscape archaeology in the Near East is Wilkinson (2003), which describes the signature landscape concept and discusses both of the case studies presented here.

Recent reviews of Early Bronze Age urban society and cultural landscapes include Stein (2004), Ur (2010a), and Matney (2012); Wilkinson (1994) provides a compelling model for the economic landscape. On trackways, see Wilkinson (1993) and Ur (2009). The climate-driven collapse of Early Bronze Age society was first proposed by Weiss and colleagues (1993) and revised in Staubwasser and Weiss (2006); recent critiques of this hypothesis include Wossink (2009), Danti (2010), and the papers in Kuzucuoğlu and Marro (2007).

On the landscapes of the Assyrian empire generally, see the synthetic overview of Wilkinson et al. (2005). For northern Iraq, the classic study by Oates (1968) has still not been superseded, although see now Altaweel (2008) for a speculative remote sensing-based approach. The rural settlement pattern is discussed in Morandi Bonacossi (2000) and Wilkinson and Barbanes (2000). A comprehensive review of Assyrian irrigation is Bagg (2000); a satellite-based restudy of Sennacherib's canals can be found in Ur (2005).

CHAPTER 2

“Assyria” in the Third Millennium BCE

Lauren Ristvet

Introduction

In the third millennium, the area from Ebla in the west to Nineveh in the east did not yet have a political or cultural identity as Assyria. The region did, however, roughly correspond to an ancient geographical term, “Upper Land,” in the inscriptions of the Old Akkadian kings (ca. 2350–2200 BC) (Postgate 1994: 5). In this chapter, the entire area bounded by Mari, Ebla, the Turkish Euphrates, and the Zagros mountains will be referred to as Northern Mesopotamia (Figure 2.1). It is contrasted with Southern Mesopotamia, which includes the areas in modern Iraq that require irrigation for successful agriculture. Although different burial practices, ceramic traditions, and settlement types define this large area, it represents a zone distinct from Southern Mesopotamia, with a common Eastern Semitic language and probably also with a shared socio-political system (Milano and Rova 2000; Archi 2006: 96–7).

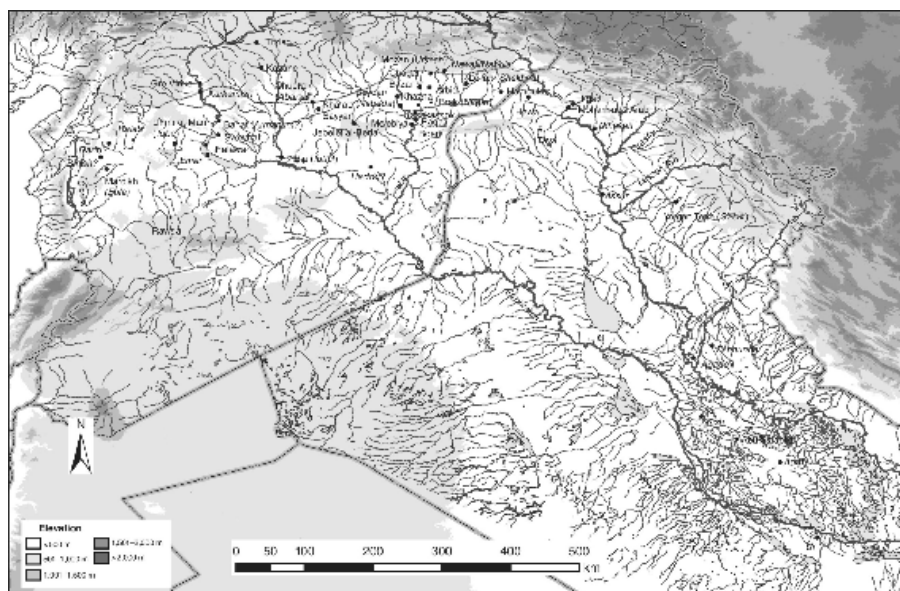


Figure 2.1 Map of Northern Mesopotamia, 3000–2000 BCE, with archaeological sites mentioned in the text.

Following the collapse of local proto-states and the abandonment of the Southern Mesopotamian Uruk colonies at the end of the fourth millennium, Northern Mesopotamia experienced a period of regionalization and ruralization, from whence emerged complex urban society. From ca. 2700 to 2300 BCE, cities and kingdoms appeared across the region. These palace-centered states had an important religious component, but temples played a different role than in Southern Mesopotamia. After 2400 BCE, we can reconstruct the political history and investigate the economic, political, and social institutions of three of these kingdoms – Ebla in West Syria, Mari on the Middle Euphrates, and Nagar in the Khabur basin – based on archaeological data and archives of cuneiform tablets, written in an early form of Akkadian (Archi 2006). Many of these states lost their autonomy around 2300 BCE, when the Old Akkadian kings conquered and integrated parts of this area into their empire. Other Northern Mesopotamian cities remained independent, but had close diplomatic ties to the Akkadian state. Following the collapse of the Akkadian empire and the beginning of a three-century long drought, many cities, towns, and villages were abandoned. Some of the remaining settlements were organized into a series of kingdoms including Mari, Urkeš, and Nineveh, which maintained limited diplomatic and commercial relations with the Third Dynasty of Ur, a state that ruled much of Southern Mesopotamia and may have extended as far north as Ashur. Trade connections between the north and the south at this time probably set the stage for the later development of Old Assyrian trading networks. Indeed, the innovations of the third millennium BCE in Northern Mesopotamia, particularly the development of kingship, administration, and literacy, provided the foundation for later developments in Assyria.

Regionalization (3200–2700 BCE)

At the beginning of the Early Bronze Age, a process of regionalization and ruralization began, as the shared traditions of the Chalcolithic gave way to diverse new cultures (Akkermans and Schwartz 2003: 211; Ur 2010: 401). Several distinct assemblages appeared, including Ninevite 5, Late Reserved Slip Ware, and Early Transcaucasian (ETC) Ware, corresponding to new social regions (Figure 2.1). These ceramic provinces may have coincided with zones of intensive economic exchange or shared political and cultural traditions. The differentiation of pottery cultures may suggest that trading networks became more localized, that potters chose to demonstrate a local, rather than interregional, identity, or that cultural and social territories shifted. Similarly, seal-users switched from the figural styles popular during the Chalcolithic to the more abstract and geometric designs characteristic of the

“piedmont style” (Pittman 1994; Matthews 1997). Like the appearance of ETC ware on the northern fringes of the area under discussion (Palumbi 2003), the adoption of the piedmont style may show a reorientation away from Southern Mesopotamia and participation in a trade network centered on western Iran. Except for a few Jemdat Nasr vessels at Brak (ancient Nagar) (Oates, Oates et al. 2001), there is little evidence of trade between the north and the south from 3000–2700 BCE. Rather, the appearance of Jemdat Nasr pottery in both coastal and inland Arabia could indicate that merchants in Southern Mesopotamia looked south instead of north (Potts 1986).

This regionalization was preceded by the collapse of the Uruk colonies, followed by local settlement decline and a decrease in average site size, coincident with a severe, century-scale drought around 3200 BCE (Weiss 2003: 601; Staubwasser and Weiss 2006). Along the Tigris and in the Assyrian plains, large towns were abandoned and replaced by a few small villages. West of the Tigris in Northern Iraq around the site of al-Hawa, the number of sites decreased by 75 percent (Wilkinson and Tucker 1995: 49). In the Khabur Plains of Syria, there is no evidence for settlement around Leilan (ancient Šeḫna) immediately after the fourth millennium, and very small numbers of settlements in the early third millennium – a decrease from fifty-three to five sites (Weiss 2003: 601). To the south, Brak, probably the largest fourth millennium city in Northern Mesopotamia, shrunk drastically in size as its lower town was abandoned, while the number of settlements around the site also decreased in number and average size (Eidem and Warburton 1996: 53–7). Evidence from plant remains at Brak indicates that following this collapse, farmers utilized new subsistence strategies, including irrigation, trade, and hunting, in response to arid conditions (Michael, Pessin et al. 2010: 197).

The settlements that remained in early third millennium Northern Mesopotamia were generally small communities, with little evidence for social stratification, rich burials, monumental architecture, elite culture, mass production, or administration (Akkermans and Schwartz 2003: 216). Several villages and towns have been excavated along the Middle Khabur, the Upper Tigris, and the Turkish and Syrian Euphrates. The vast majority of settlements were under 5 ha, with a few larger towns between 15–25 ha like Nineveh, Leilan, Brak, Jigan, and perhaps Hawa (Schwartz 2003: 585). Houses within these towns and villages generally had one or two rooms, with little variation in size or decoration. Where neighborhoods of such houses have been excavated, as at the small site of Raqa’i, it is clear that they are arrayed along irregular alleyways, with little evidence for settlement planning (Schwartz and Klucas 1998).

In addition to houses, a few examples of non-domestic architecture have also been unearthed, especially temples and storage or production facilities. At Brak, Raqa’i, Kashkashok, and Chagar Bazar, small, one-roomed temples

have been excavated, some with stepped altars and others with enclosure walls (Matthews 2002). Gre Virike on the Upper Euphrates was a small cultic site, where worshippers presented offerings of grain and meat and probably attended rituals on a mudbrick platform, associated with a sacred spring (Ökse 2006). Otherwise, large-scale storage facilities, probably granaries, have been excavated at several village and town sites, particularly along the Middle Khabur (Akkermans and Schwartz 2003: 216–23). Some scholars have suggested that this stored grain was sent down river to the city of Mari, the first urban center in this area, founded around 2950 BCE (Schwartz 1994; Fortin 1998). Others hypothesize that local populations consumed this grain, either villagers or pastoralists living in the steppe (Hole 1999; Pfälzner 2002).

The appearance of simple egalitarian settlements in the early third millennium after a period of experimentation with political complexity runs counter to assumptions that societies increase in complexity over time. As Glenn Schwartz asks, “why, despite centuries of contact with the urban civilization of southern Mesopotamia, was there no immediate flowering of urbanism and societal complexity?” (Akkermans and Schwartz 2003: 211). The answers to this question are no doubt multifaceted, but part of the explanation may lie in the nature of previous complex societies and their collapse. Recent finds at Brak and Hamoukar highlight the violent nature of fourth millennium society (McMahon, Oates et al. 2007; Soltysiak 2008; Ur 2010: 397–8), and evidence from this time for central control of large amounts of surplus goods and extensive feasting points to a production process that relied on slaves or impoverished peasants. Anthropologists describe such systems as “structural violence” and emphasize that they require cultural or symbolic justification – religion, ideology, and art – to endure (Galtung 1990). In the fourth millennium, such justification was probably religious, as we can see from excavations at the Eye Temple at Brak and the presence of eye idols across the region (Mallowan 1947). When century-scale drought struck the area at the turn of the millennium, it undermined the previous system in two ways: it showed the failure of the elites to satisfy the gods, and made the accumulation of surplus grain from dry-farming nearly impossible.¹ The settlements that survived this catastrophe, often small villages, responded by rejecting the previous unsustainable system. They switched to a risk-averse, village-based agricultural system, characterized by high crop diversity and a mixed-economy. The egalitarianism of Ninevite 5 villages could indicate a society that attempted to retard the accumulation of individual wealth. For most of this period, the only evidence of administration or collection of goods comes from simple temples and store-houses, which may have been controlled by the community as a whole. Such community institutions are consistent with a system that emphasizes sustainability (Pfälzner 2002).

The switch in orientation away from Southern Mesopotamia, visible in the glyptic and some pottery styles, was also part of this transformation. ETC

pottery and decorated andirons like those from the Caucasus, present in the northern fringes of the area, have long been interpreted as representing the actual movement of people (Sagona 1984; Rothman 2003; Paz 2009), but this domestic assemblage could also represent openness to the values and practices of the highlands, egalitarianism and communitarianism (Philip 1999; Ristvet, Bakhshaliev et al. 2011). Graham Philip has suggested that in the Levant, adoption of ETC pottery may have illustrated a choice to “[opt] out of the specialized economy” of emerging state societies (Philip 1999: 164). In contrast to the ever-more unequal societies of Southern Mesopotamia, highland societies with their focus on the domestic and equitable distribution of wealth offered an alternate template for Northern Mesopotamian societies.

The Second Urban Revolution (2700–2400 BCE)

Yet, this egalitarian, early third millennium society contained the seeds of its own destruction. By 2600 BCE, kings or groups of “elders” had gained power over populations across this area, perhaps using “feasting economies” associated with funerals and religious institutions to harness labor and wealth in nascent city-states. Brian Hayden has studied funeral feasts documented ethnographically and has argued that they often lead to economic intensification in places where the resource base allows it. As occasions when emotions run high, funerals are ideal grounds for creating, strengthening, and displaying political and social alliances, particularly in societies in which warfare is a constant (Hayden 2009). The transformation of feasting economies into stratified societies occurred during a period of optimal climate (Bar-Matthews, Ayalon et al. 1998), when large tracts of land were fertile and yields were high, leading to more institutionalized forms of staple collection and redistribution. At present, archaeological evidence may indicate that this transformation began first along the Euphrates and in the Western Jezirah, east of the Balih, where three cities were founded *ex novo* by 2800 BCE – Mari, Chuera (ancient Abarsal?), and Kharab Sayyar (Margueron 2004; Ur 2010: 397–8; Meyer 2011), but C-14 dates indicating the primacy of this area remain to be presented.

At Leilan, evidence from an administrative district illustrates how feasting practices changed at the same time that this town grew into a 90 hectare city. Around 2700–2600 BCE, evidence from a burial of a high-status man and an associated pit of ornate serving vessels indicates funeral feasting (Schwartz 1986; Bolt and Green 2003; Weiss 1990). The vessels – twenty of which were decorated with paint or incising – were probably used for a banquet celebrating the life of the deceased or offerings for the dead (Forest 2003). Similar wealthy graves at Rijm, Mozan (ancient Urkeš), and Mohammed Arab indicate that this was a widespread practice (Bolt and Green 2003). Just above

the strata containing these burials is evidence that feasting probably continued at Leilan, but its nature changed. About fifty years after the burial, this area was converted to a religious/administrative district with the construction of a 150m² cultic platform associated with storage rooms. Remains of deer and gazelle bones in the open space south of the cultic platform may have derived from religious feasting; the consumption of unusual food, like game, is one archaeological signal of feasting (Weiss 1997). Other feasts may have taken place in the open space at the center of several other Northern Mesopotamian cities – particularly Mozan and Chuera – hinting that feasting was more widespread. Seal impressions found in the Leilan storage room attest to the fact that goods in this area – probably food products – were carefully controlled, suggesting that authorities were involved with dispensing food. Moreover, the most common scene depicted on those seals were of banquets, further evidence of the importance of feasts (Parayre 2003). Iconography at other centers also celebrates banqueting; for instance, at Ebla, in G5, perhaps the city's first palace, a fragmentary stone plaque depicting a drinking party was found (Dolce 2008).

Feasting imagery draws on Southern Mesopotamian themes, although seal impressions and plaques are rendered in a local, Northern Mesopotamian style (Weiss 1990; Schwartz 1994). This is a significant shift from previous practices, and must be seen as a conscious choice on the part of Northern Mesopotamian elites to “adopt the symbols of status and power” of the same, complex society that they had ignored previously (Schwartz 1994). The two most popular Southern Mesopotamian themes that appear in Northern glyptic were banquet and contest scenes, which were combined with a variety of local features. These scenes were probably chosen because of their resonance with power and kingship in Southern Mesopotamia and because they echoed cultural practices already present in Northern Mesopotamia. I have emphasized the initial, local roots of feasting beginning ca. 2700 BCE, but much of the later elaboration of this practice (ca. 2600–2400 BCE) occurred at a time of increased contact with and imitation of Southern Mesopotamia, where feasting is celebrated in artwork, but also in the graves of the Royal Cemetery of Ur, where many were buried clutching cups, sometimes raised to their mouths. In Southern Mesopotamia, feasting was used both to build alliances and emphasize class differences (Schmandt-Besserat 2001; Pollock 2003; Cohen 2005). Susan Pollock has argued that the funeral feasts in the royal cemetery “helped to inculcate correct etiquette, procedures and unquestioning obedience to the roles of the feast,” creating ideal state subjects (Pollock 2007: 102). Contest scenes, on the other hand, which depict heroes battling animals, have been linked to the development of the ideology of kingship and heroism (Costello 2010). Military valor and exclusive leadership was another critical element for the new states.

It seems likely that the growing wealth of the region may have encouraged

greater competition and external aggression. Textual records indicate that in the early second millennium BCE, cities across the Near East, from Mari, Eshnunna, Ekallatum, Susa, Babylon, and Aleppo, fought to control this wealthy area during a similar period of climatic amelioration and settlement growth (Lafont 2001: 320). Three inscriptions of Eannatum (ca. 2450–2425) mention the armies of Lagash battling those of Mari and Subartu, an area located somewhere in Northern or Northeastern Mesopotamia (Frayne 2008: RIME 1: E1.9.3.1: rev. vi 5; E1.9.3.5: vi 17; E1.9.3.7a: ii 2).² We know that Mari campaigned across Northern Mesopotamia in the 24th century; it seems likely that this city was also militarily active earlier. Additionally, glyptic designs, sculpture, and city-planning provide indirect evidence of increased conflict. Combat scenes and other warlike imagery are popular in the early seals from Brak, Chuera, Mari, and Leilan, perhaps because of the increasing importance of warfare to these new polities (Matthews 1997; Ristvet 2007). The larger-than-life-size statue and stelae from Jebel al-Beda, in the steppe near the Jebel ‘Abd-el-Aziz, depict a man wielding a mace; the site may be a victory monument (although other interpretations have also been suggested) (Moortgat-Correns 1972). At Ebla, the “Victory Standard” probably dates to around 2500 BCE and illustrates triumphant soldiers humiliating defeated or dead enemies and bringing spoils of war to the king (Matthiae 2010). And fortifications were part of the original layout of urban centers at Nineveh, Leilan, Chuera, Mari, and Ebla, among others. Increasing warfare could have contributed to urbanization by encouraging farmers to move into walled cities and by making their labor more desirable to emerging elites, who would have needed increasing surpluses of grain to feed their soldiers, as well as men to serve in this capacity. At Leilan, the ratio of dry to moist weeds in crop samples increased around 2600 BCE, evidence for the expansion of fields away from river or wadi banks to the drier plains to feed a growing urban population (Wetterstrom 2003: 391–2).

What can we say about the cities themselves? The biggest cities in Northern Mesopotamia were 100–125 ha large, with a maximum population somewhere between 6000 and 25,000 people (Wilkinson 1994). Most Northern Mesopotamian cities consisted of a single high mound, surrounded by a lower town which was delimited from the surrounding countryside by a city wall with multiple gates. Although some cities, like Mari and Rawda, were new foundations, many others, like Leilan, Hamoukar, Titriş, Kazane, and Mozan, grew to urban size through the construction of a lower town around an older high mound. These new cities exhibited different degrees of planning, along a spectrum from highly planned to unplanned. Evidence for planning includes urban form (earlier cities tend to be round, later ones are square), regular streets (radial or orthogonal), and standardized building lots (Meyer 2011; Pfälzner 2011) (Figure 2.2). The circular city of Tell Chuera falls on the planned side of the spectrum, with a combination of radial and circular roads. In the center of the city’s Upper Town, an open space, “the Anton-Moortgat-

Platz,” provides a focus for the settlement. This square and Chuera’s main temples and palace are all arrayed along a central axis. Limited magnetometry at Mozan indicates that this city followed the same pattern. The octagonal city also had a radial street plan, a central plaza, and an Upper Town with religious and administrative buildings. Beydar (ancient Nabada) is a variation on this plan, with radial streets, but no central plaza. At Leilan and Titriş, there is evidence for straight, planned streets, which were laid before residential areas were built (Weiss 1990; Matney 2002: 26; Nishimura 2008). On the less-planned side of the spectrum, at Kazane, a pattern of semi-orthogonal streets has been interpreted as the result of “convenience rather than central-planning” (Creekmore 2010).



Figure 2.2 Leilan Lower Town South, 1989, Worker’s Neighborhood (ca. 2300–2200 BCE).

The evidence for urban housing from 2600 to 2400 BCE may indicate the use of regular plots, with the frontages of most houses falling into standard dimensions, based on the Sumerian nindan measurement (equivalent to about 5m or 16.4 feet). Houses with frontages of 1, 1.25, 2, and 3 nindan have been identified at Chuera, Bderi, Abu Hafur, Melebiya, and Leilan (Pfälzner 2001). At Titriş, houses appeared to have been built on regular-sized plots, either 7 × 12m or 11 × 11m (Matney 2002: 27). In general, there is evidence of central planning across the region, but not of the rigid type that led to orthogonal Roman military camps, Chinese Medieval capitals, or eighteenth-century European cities. Some cities, particularly circular cities, were perhaps planned from above, while in other cities, perceived regularity may have resulted more from the actions of individual builders constructing houses in crowded urban spaces than from formal, centralized planning (Smith 2007: 13–16).

Cities were characterized by monumental buildings, especially palaces with associated temples. Small soundings of later third millennium palaces at Ebla and Leilan have revealed secular administrative architecture dating to around 2600–2500 BCE. At Ebla, excavations beneath Palace G have exposed its mid-third millennium predecessor, Building G2, a storage facility (Dolce 2010). At Tell Leilan, excavations on the Acropolis Northwest have revealed a series of storage rooms, covering at least 300m², which are associated with a 150m² platform dating to 2600 BCE (Calderone and Weiss 2003). These two activity areas almost certainly comprised the southwestern quarter of an administrative building, a predecessor to the later Akkadian administrative building. By 2500–2300 BCE, there is evidence for palaces that combined several elements found in earlier “public architecture” according to a semi-standardized groundplan (Bretschneider and Jans 1997). Palaces at Beydar, Chuera, Bi’a, Mozan, Leilan, Ebla, and Mari included storerooms, reception suites and cultic areas. At both Mozan and Leilan, for example, palaces abut platforms containing burnt altars, with associated mortuary structures and water installations. At Mozan, the stone platform was constructed along with a keyhole-shaped stone structure that enclosed a deep shaft where offerings had been deposited. Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati interprets this construction as an *abi*, a Hurrian “passage to the netherworld” (Kelly-Buccellati 2002). At Leilan, an ossuary is located in a similar position southeast of the platform (Weiss 1997). The *Palais Présargonique* at Mari also includes cultic installations in the south of the palace (Margueron 2004).

Freestanding temples of this period have also been excavated at Mari, Beydar, and Mozan. The temples at Mari and Beydar are located close to these cities’ palaces; both institutions probably comprised one public district. At Beydar, the path leading to the official quarter was “lined with temples ... creating a monumental entrance for visiting dignitaries and the elaborate processions accompanying them” (Bretschneider 2000). The relationship between temples and palaces in the mid-third millennium in Northern Mesopotamia thus differs greatly from that in Southern Mesopotamia, where they were spatially segregated.

Excavations of administrative buildings mirror the ambiguity attested in the third millennium documentation with regard to kings and elders, institutions that could rule together or separately. Palaces in Northern Mesopotamia housed both single and communal leaders. The reception suite in the Beydar palace, for example, was remodeled during the course of phase 4. In the beginning of this phase, a podium was attested in the “throne-room,” but when this area was rebuilt, its function changed, perhaps allowing it to serve as a community institution, once Beydar was incorporated into the kingdom of Nagar (Sallaberger and Ur 2004). Successive public buildings (6 and 7) at Tell Banat had stone foundations and were built on multiple levels, atop “White Monument 3,” a communal burial structure (Porter 2002). These

buildings may also have been areas for local communal authority, like the smaller assembly buildings at Halawa and Sweyhat (Danti and Zettler 2007).

The cities and their monumental palaces were not the only places affected by this urban transformation. The appearance of cities and settlement hierarchies changed the nature of smaller settlements as much as it did larger ones (Schwarz and Falconer 1994). Unlike in Southern Mesopotamia during the fourth millennium, the urbanization process did not mean the decimation of the countryside; instead settled hectareage increased overall. In the area around Leilan, the growth of Leilan from a 15 ha to a 90 ha city inaugurated a four-tier settlement hierarchy. From 2650–2300 BCE, between 58 percent and 68 percent of people lived in towns or cities larger than 10 ha (Ristvet 2005). A well-developed network of second and third tier sites probably reduced transport costs and streamlined the administration of agricultural production. Other surveys in the East Jezira indicate similar trajectories of population growth and the centralization of the population in towns and cities. This might mirror a shift in land use from unified to dispersed field systems which can be correlated with less local control over agricultural land. To the south, west of the Middle Khabur, settlement expanded into the steppe with the foundation of circular cities that probably emphasized control of both agricultural and pastoral resources (Hole and Kouchoukos 1994). Along the Middle Euphrates, the urbanization of Mari was accompanied by the foundation of several settlements and cemeteries in the steppe. Along the Upper Euphrates and in Western Syria, there are similar patterns of increasing site numbers as well as larger sites throughout the third millennium, although the timing of these events differed across the region (Cooper 2007).

The Ebla World-System (2400–2300 BCE)

Beginning sometime after 2400 BCE, the earliest tablets from Mari, Ebla, and Nagar provide insight into the political and cultural geography of Northern Mesopotamia. About 5000 tablets from Ebla come from an administrative archive that was preserved by the fiery destruction and abandonment of Palace G. The archives document a period of somewhere between forty and fifty years; the texts bear no date formulae, so determining their internal chronology has been a major research project (Biga 2003). Most of the documents are economic and administrative texts, including monthly and yearly summary accounts of textiles and metals received and distributed. But the archive also includes some examples of royal correspondence and treaties with other Mesopotamian states, the oldest ones ever written anywhere. Finally, a few literary and educational texts show that there was a scribal school at Ebla, where teachers who had studied at Mari or Kiš could train student scribes. One mathematical list at Ebla may even have been written by

a scribe from Kiš, in Central Mesopotamia, 800 kilometers (500 miles) away (Podany 2010). Other, smaller archives of tablets have been found at Mari and at Beydar, part of the kingdom of Nagar, indicating that writing was widespread across Northern Mesopotamia. The tablets depict a dynamic world, where nearly constant warfare meant unstable frontiers and shifting alliances. The three cities of Ebla, Mari, and Nagar used a number of different strategies to establish their dominance and to integrate smaller, previously independent communities into their spheres. We can examine these strategies on a number of scales, from the local to the international.

On the local level, the palace at Ebla provided rations or other sustenance for 15,000–20,000 people, most of whom probably lived at this city or in the nearby countryside, up to a two day walk away (perhaps 50 km at the furthest). These workers were first organized into units of twenty and then into larger teams. A supervisor was responsible for overseeing the work of several teams and providing them with regular rations. The texts use terms to designate these teams that are both territorial and administrative; workers may belong to a certain city gate (probably an urban ward), the palace, or “Ebla” itself, meaning a district outside of the city proper. Most palace-owned fields, many of which were ceded to palace employees or relatives of the king as payment for service, were located within this inner area. The area around Ebla was densely settled; hundreds of villages are discussed in the archives, few of which, unfortunately, have been documented archaeologically (Milano 1995). The fields belonging to the palace and other large property owners were fragmented and dispersed among several villages, probably as a risk-management strategy. Nonetheless, most of the grain that the palace received came from no more than 50 km away, and this same distance probably represented the area that Ebla controlled directly. A religious and perhaps even mythological landscape with Ebla and its kings at its center may have coincided with this local sphere (Ristvet 2011). The Ebla coronation ritual, with its pilgrimage to the city of Binaš, the site of a royal mausoleum, as well as offerings to the ancestral kings of Ebla at Darib, probably took place within an area of just a few days walk from the city. At Nagar and Mari, we have no texts detailing the administration of the city or the nearby countryside, but evidence from settlement patterns may attest to a similar inner core.

Beyond their immediate hinterlands, Ebla, Mari, and Nagar also interacted with a shifting number of dependent polities. During the forty to fifty years of the Ebla archives, the city’s political influence extended east to the Upper Euphrates and west to the Orontes Valley, although the limits of this influence shifted constantly. At various periods, this city controlled villages and farmland located further east, between the Baliḥ and the Euphrates. Ebla interacted with these smaller cities in several ways. We have records of gifts of textiles and metal objects that were sent to the kings and nobles of client cities on a regular basis. These gifts probably helped to seal diplomatic

alliances, such as those documented by the treaties that we know Ebla contracted with Kablul and Burman, probably two cities on the Upper Euphrates (Fronzaroli 2003). In some cases, these gifts could be substantial. The alliance between Emar and Ebla involved gifts of large tracts of real estate, including entire villages, and a diplomatic marriage between a princess of Ebla and the king of Emar (Archi 1990). Kings and high officials of Ebla also participated in religious ceremonies in order to help integrate these client kingdoms into a larger, Ebla-dominated world. Several members of a religious confraternity from Ebla made an annual journey to thirty-seven different towns between Ebla and the Orontes in honor of the god 'Adabal, the most important god in the west (Archi 2002). And urban authorities from a region called Ibal, probably northeast of Ebla, were brought to Ebla in order to make offerings of oil to Ebla's chief god Kura, and swear allegiance to him and to Ebla in his temple (Fronzaroli 2003: ARET 13 14). Archaeologically, some of our best information about these client states comes from the excavations at Umm el-Marra, perhaps ancient Tuba. A series of royal graves excavated there attest to the wealth of these client states (Schwartz, Curvers et al. 2006). Other wealthy third millennium graves have been excavated along the Upper Euphrates, particularly at Jerablus Tahtani, Tell Ahmar, and Banat (Cooper 2006). It seems likely that Mari, Nagar, and other major kingdoms interacted with their client states in similar ways, sometimes providing gifts, sometimes demanding tribute or troops, and always employing a range of diplomatic strategies.

Smaller cities were often caught up in the rivalry between the major powers. An unusual memorandum, found in the Ebla archives, records the arguments of a Mari envoy to the king of Haddu, located somewhere east of the Euphrates, about why he should shift his allegiance from Ebla to Mari (Fronzaroli 2003; Archi and Biga 2003). We do not, unfortunately, know if the king was persuaded. The archives found at Beydar indicate that the king of Nagar also devoted time and resources to securing and maintaining the loyalty of client states. Administrative texts dating to a visit from Nagar's king illustrate that he was constantly on the move, demonstrating his personal control of this area (Sallaberger 2001). Beydar was probably just at the edge of the territory ruled by Nagar, whose kings, in all likelihood, also participated in other ritual processions, not attested in Beydar's tablets. Images of religious processions are popular at Beydar and present at Nagar; together with a number of unusual cultic sites (like Hazna and Jibelet al-Beda) they may provide additional evidence for a similar religious landscape (Bretschneider, Jans et al. 2009; Ristvet 2011).

Finally, Nagar, Ebla, Mari, Abarsal, and Kiš constituted an international sphere, marked by warfare, diplomatic alliances, and a shared written language. Indeed, much of Northern Mesopotamia, as well as some of the northern cities in Southern Mesopotamia, were part of a cultural sphere often

called the “Kiš civilization.” These cities shared a writing system, calendar, measurement system, and aspects of a common religion, from Adab to Ebla (a distance of more than 900 km) (Gelb 1992). The Ebla archives clearly indicate that at the beginning of this period, Mari was the most powerful state in Northern Mesopotamia. A famous letter from the king of Mari, Enna-Dagan, to an unknown king at Ebla lists Mari’s conquests and describes how Mari turned conquered cities into heaps of ruins, or perhaps of corpses. During Enna-Dagan’s reign, Ebla paid huge quantities of tribute in gold and silver (more than 2000 pounds of silver and more than 100 of gold) to Mari, but later on, Ebla was able to establish equal status and no longer contributed to Mari’s coffers. The two city states continued to compete, however, particularly for access to the Upper Euphrates and areas further north and east.

Several treaties found at Ebla, particularly a well-preserved text recording Ebla’s alliance with Abarsal, another strong state, provide us with evidence of international diplomacy. We know from references in administrative texts from Ebla that Ebla and Mari contracted at least two treaties (Archi and Biga 2003: 10–12). Nonetheless, the cities remained rivals, and Ebla sought to isolate Mari diplomatically by contracting alliances with Nagar and Kiš, sealed by the marriages of two Eblaites princesses, and to defeat it militarily. Although Ebla did win an important victory over Mari, just three years later, perhaps sometime shortly before 2300 BCE, the tables turned dramatically. The imposing Palace G on Ebla’s citadel was burned, preserving the city’s archives, and much of the Acropolis was abandoned. It seems most likely that the attackers came from Mari, and that this catastrophe, which destroyed Ebla’s pre-eminence in Northern Syria, was simply the final stage in a longer military contest between the two cities (Archi and Biga 2003).

Archaeology provides another, often complementary source of evidence, which casts light on matters that the scribes did not record. In the Ebla tablets, Mari, Ebla, and Nagar emerge as the pre-eminent city-states or kingdoms, yet from excavation and survey we know several large cities existed further east, including Leilan, Hamoukar, Hawa, Taya, Nineveh, and Ashur, each of which probably controlled a kingdom. These places are absent from the Ebla documentation, probably hidden from view by the machinations of the elite of Nagar, the easternmost city from the point of view of Ebla. Ashur may be mentioned in three Ebla documents, but it is unclear if the toponym refers to the famous city on the Tigris, or a smaller place of the same name near Ebla (Archi and Biga 2003: 18, fn. 54). Although we do not have textual information about the society and economy of these cities, the view from archaeology indicates that they probably shared a common framework with their neighbors to the west. Textual data on Southern Mesopotamian cities, such as Kiš and Adab, is sparse too, but a hoard of precious objects found at Mari contains many that were made in the South, including a lapis lazuli bead with an inscription of Mesanepada, king of Ur (he also claimed the title king

of Kiš), presumably indicating economic and diplomatic contact with this southern city. Together, the textual and archaeological evidence indicate the emergence of a cultural sphere that encompassed Greater Mesopotamia by the middle of the third millennium BCE.

Merchants and Empires (2300–2000 BCE)

A few years after the burning of Ebla, Mari suffered the same fate, and the palace, the temples of Ištar and Ninḫursag, artisans' houses, and other areas of the city went up in flames (Margueron 2004). It is always difficult to determine the culprit in the case of an archaeological destruction level, and it is not entirely excluded that no militaries were involved. Many historians, however, blame a representative of a new power in Southern Mesopotamia, Sargon of Akkad, who certainly boasted of destroying Mari in his inscriptions. For a little more than a century, Sargon and his descendants ruled an empire that united the fractious city-states of Southern Mesopotamia and some of the kingdoms of Northern Mesopotamia, before it collapsed and the north again experienced a decline in settlement.

It seems that some time in the late 24th century, Sargon (2334–2279 BCE) managed to usurp power in the city of Kiš. He then moved the center of his rule to Akkad, which may have been a new foundation. The ruins of Akkad have never been found, but may lie under the suburbs of Baghdad (Reade 2002). Sargon's royal inscriptions boast of extensive campaigns in both North and South Mesopotamia. He was the first king to transform the traditional title "King of Kiš" into the more bombastic, "king of the world," relying on a word play between the name of the city and the Akkadian term for "everything" (Van de Mieroop 2007). Although Sargon united the south, he may have done no more than pillage the cities in the north, rather like his predecessors at Ebla, Mari, and Kiš (Steinkeller 1993). There is more evidence in northern Mesopotamia for control by his sons, Rimuš and Maništušu (2278–2255 BCE, the order of their reigns is uncertain). However, it seems likely that Northern Mesopotamia was only integrated into the Akkadian imperial structure under the rule of Naram-Sin, Sargon's grandson, who also propagated an ideology of power and unity. He deified himself, proclaiming that he was chosen as the city god of Akkad, and adopted a new title: "king of the four corners (of the universe)" (Van de Mieroop 2007). These ideological changes were part of a political strategy that sought to unify the empire politically and economically. During his reign, standardized accounting and measurement systems were employed across the empire to collect revenue efficiently (Foster 1993). In Northern Mesopotamia, there is evidence that Akkadian intervention in economy and politics became stronger during his reign.

Texts from the early second millennium BCE claim that Maništušu built a

temple to Ištar, the most important goddess of the Mesopotamian pantheon, at Nineveh, but there are few other signs of an Old Akkadian presence here (Westenholz 2004). A bronze head of an Akkadian ruler, perhaps Naram-Sin, was found associated with this temple, although it probably was brought to Nineveh as booty later (Reade 2005: 361). Better documented is an imperial presence at five other cities in Northern Mesopotamia: Gasur, Ashur, Šeḫna, Nagar, and Mari. Each of these cities probably had an Akkadian governor, at least from the reign of Naram-Sin. Administrative texts excavated from Gasur (modern Yorgan Tepe, near Kirkuk) resemble those found in Southern Mesopotamia (Foster 1982). At Nagar, a large administrative building, built out of bricks stamped with the name of Naram-Sin, served as a storage depot for the Akkadian kings, perhaps a redistributive center that received grain from the many centers of Northern Mesopotamia and sent it downstream to Southern Mesopotamia (Mallowan 1947: 63–70; Sommerfeld, Archi et al. 2004). A bulla found at Nagar that had been sealed by the governor of Gasur attests to connections between these officials (Matthews 1997: seal 317). Excavations at Šeḫna have revealed another administrative building, probably related to the control of the rich wheat fields of the Jezirah (Ristvet, Guilderson et al. 2004). An intriguing recent discovery at Šeḫna is a schoolroom near the palace, where students were instructed in Akkadian language and script (and perhaps taught imperial history and ideology) (De Lillis-Forrest, Milano et al. 2007). A sealing found nearby contains the name of a šabra-official, the main imperial civilian office (Weiss, deLillis et al. 2002). At Ashur, the temple of Ištar was certainly patronized by the Akkadian kings, who donated precious objects to it (Bär 2003). A life-size stone statue, perhaps depicting the Akkadian king Maništušu, was found in Ashur, near a temple to the gods Anu and Adad (Harper, Klengel-Brandt et al. 1995). A (possibly post-Akkadian) fragmentary list from Ur mentions a governor of Ashur with the Akkadian name Ilaba-andul, and an inscription from the Ištar temple in Ashur refers to an “overseer” (*waklum*) named Ititi, who may also have served as a governor of Mari, with the title of a *šakkanakkum* (Foster 2016: 63–4). At Mari, Naram-Sin appointed governors to rule the city, and his daughters donated gifts to a temple, although this city and other places in the west seem to have been of less importance to the Akkadians (Sallaberger 2007). Beyond architectural and art historical evidence, changing settlement patterns in the Khabur basin may indicate that the Akkadian empire sought to streamline the administration of this region. Near Leilan several towns were abandoned and the number of village increased, perhaps due to an imperial policy that eliminated lower levels of administration and encouraged increased agricultural production (Ristvet and Weiss 2005).

Yet Naram-Sin did not rule all of Northern Mesopotamia directly. He campaigned in the mountains of Turkey, as far north as Pir Huseyn, but probably did not establish any lasting control in this area. Excavations over the last twenty years at the site of Urkeš, near the Syrian-Turkish border, have

revealed a palace that belonged to an independent king, perhaps a client of the Akkadian empire. About two hundred clay sealings, marked with a cylinder seal that once belonged to Tar'am-Agade, daughter of Naram-Sin and probably queen of Urkeš, were found in the palace. Clearly, the Akkadian kings, like their predecessors at Ebla, used diplomatic marriage to seal alliances. Tar'am-Agade's very name, which means "She loves Agade," illustrates the strength of Akkadian ideology (Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 2002). We know of other diplomatic marriages from texts, including the union of a princess of Marḥaši, a state in Iran, and Naram-Sin's son, Šarkališarri.

For all of its ambitions, the Akkadian empire's dominance of Mesopotamia was short-lived. Sometime during Šarkališarri's reign (2217–2193 BCE), the Akkadian state collapsed, no longer able to confront internal rebellion or external threats. Šarkališarri's successors ruled a much less extensive state, perhaps only the area around Akkad, before losing that too. The period between the end of Šarkališarri's reign and the rise of the Third Dynasty of Ur is one of the least understood epochs in the Ancient Near East. There is little historical and archaeological evidence from it; we do not even know whether it lasted 100 or perhaps as many as 160 years (Sallaberger 2007).

Paleoclimatology research over the past twenty years has revealed that the collapse of the Akkadian empire occurred at the same time as a major climate event, when rainfall decreased, perhaps by as much as 30 percent (Weiss 2000; Weiss and Bradley 2001; Staubwasser and Weiss 2006). In Northern Mesopotamia, the drought caused much of the population to either move to areas where water was readily available, like riversides, or to change their agricultural practices. Many farmers probably became pastoralists, combining some plant cultivation with a focus on herding sheep and goats. In the area around Šeḥna, this led the number of settlements to decrease by about 75 percent, a precipitous decline (Ristvet and Weiss 2005). Many cities decreased in size, and Nagar's Akkadian temples and palaces were abandoned and reoccupied by simple houses (Oates, Oates et al. 2001). Northern Mesopotamia was not entirely abandoned, as a few reduced-size towns and villages remained in the better-watered northern part of the plain and along the rivers, but the nature of settlement changed dramatically. With the Akkadian empire gone, their client state Urkeš moved to fill the population and political vacuum in the Khabur plains, establishing a "Kingdom of Urkeš and Nawar" probably centered in an area along the modern Turkish/Syrian border, between Urkeš and Nabula (perhaps ancient Nawar). This kingdom remains enigmatic; we know that its elites wrote in Hurrian, perhaps a Caucasian language, rather than in Akkadian, and we have a few royal names, but little other historical evidence. Recent excavations at Urkeš have exposed the ancient religious and political core of the city, a collection of temples, and the royal palace. The palace was built around 2300 BCE, just when Sargon began campaigning in the north, and was abandoned around or just after 2100

BCE, perhaps enduring a century after the Akkadian empire's collapse (Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 2004). Nagar also had a ruler with a Hurrian name at this time, attesting to a Hurrian presence. At Mari, the descendants of the Akkadian rulers of the city formed a dynasty that retained the Akkadian title *šakkanakku*, "governor," even though its members ruled independently for 350 years (Durand 1985). After the collapse of the Akkadian empire, Mari once again enjoyed a great deal of prosperity and political power, attested both archaeologically and historically.

From 2112–2004 BCE, Southern Mesopotamia was again ruled by a unified empire, the Third Dynasty of Ur. Unlike the Akkadians, the kings of Ur were not interested in conquering Northern Mesopotamia, parts of which were probably uncultivable during this period. Rather they used gifts and diplomatic marriages to ensure friendly contacts with a range of independent kingdoms, including Nineveh, Mari, Ebla, Uršu, and Šīmanum, among others. It is unclear whether an inscription from Ashur written in the name of "Zarriqum, governor (*šakkanakkum*) of Ashur" and dedicated to "the life of (the Ur III king) Amar-Suen" indicates that the Ur III empire directly ruled Ashur as a province, or if the local ruler simply recognized the kings of Ur as his overlords as the other kingdoms of the north did (Michalowski 2009). Perhaps 200 years after their destruction by Sargon, Mari and Ebla reemerge as the most important cities in the north in the documents from the Ur III empire. Indeed, a daughter of the king of Mari named Taram-Uram became a wife of Šulgi, the king of Ur. Members of Mari's ruling family also filled other important roles in the Ur III state, including that of the temple administrator of the Šamaš temple of Larsa. Other diplomatic marriages include one between a princess of Nineveh and Šu-Sin of Ur. Urkeš disappears from the records around 2041, as another northern city, Šīmanum, which has not yet been located, becomes the dominant center in the region (Sallaberger 2007).

Archaeological evidence from Mari and Urkeš corresponds nicely with the historical evidence. Evidence for Mari's wealth during this period includes temple complexes as well as industrial installations and areas of domestic housing. Palaces from this period have been excavated at both Mari and Tell Bi'a (Tuttul), the cult city of the god Dagan, which was probably part of Mari's kingdom. At Urkeš, part of a large, well-made building, almost equivalent in size to some Mesopotamian palaces, indicates other contacts between the south and the north. One of the building's rooms contained more than 250 clay objects bearing an impression of a seal belonging to Pussam, a wealthy merchant from an unknown city. Pussam's name is Hurrian, like many of the names at Urkeš, but the contents of his "house" as well as its architectural style point to links with the area along the Diyala River, north of Baghdad in Southern Mesopotamia. His seal and a few other seals found here were probably made sometime around 2100 BCE, when Urkeš was still

powerful. It is possible that the building was a trading depot, since it is too large to be a residence, and is well-equipped with store-rooms, indicating its economic function (Dohmann-Pfälzner and Pfälzner 2001). This evidence for large-scale trade between Northern and Southern Mesopotamia is tantalizing, particularly in light of the development of the Old Assyrian trading network, just a few decades later. Outside of Urkeš, little is known archaeologically. Although pottery dating from this period has been found elsewhere, it has usually been from poorly preserved contexts including small houses, industrial installations or pits, as at Brak, Chagar Bazar, and Arbid (Bielński 2001: 317–18; McMahon and Quenet 2007). The nature of settlement seems different from earlier in the third millennium, perhaps because many residents had more mobile lifestyles. Texts from Southern Mesopotamia report a new pastoralist element in the North, the tribal Amorites. Later, when we have documentation from the north itself, these Amorites have seized control and become the leaders of revitalized cities. Their tribal structures provide one of the models for the regeneration of urban society around 1900 BCE (Ristvet 2008; Wossink 2009). The late third millennium foundations of this regeneration remain to be explicated.

Conclusion

During the third millennium BCE, Northern Mesopotamia witnessed a period of social experimentation, when political power shifted from city to city across the region, and social and economic strategies were in flux. The third millennium is bracketed by two poorly understood periods, probably corresponding to episodes of drought when settled agriculture became impracticable in much of this area. During the first period, local people turned to hunting and irrigation to supplement inadequate dry-farming crop yields, during the second, a more mobile economy with a greater reliance on sheep and goat pastoralism emerged. Political institutions also shifted, from temples and communal storage buildings that emphasized egalitarianism, to strong, palace-centered polities, to, at the very end of this period, mobile, perhaps tribal groups. The area was home to Hurrian and Akkadian speakers, and by the end of the millennium, Amorite speakers as well. Little is known from the heartland of Assyria, due to the inaccessibility of the layers beneath the extensive buildings from the second and first millennium BCE, but there are hints that Nineveh and Ashur were already important centers. Although Northern Mesopotamia in the third millennium was not yet “Assyria,” several elements were already in place that would contribute to later Assyrian political culture, including kingship, a strong economy based on both agriculture and stock raising, an administrative culture, and perhaps most importantly, a political system flexible enough to incorporate very disparate

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Further Reading

There is no one volume that discusses the history and archaeology of the third millennium BCE. Recent archaeological information can be found in Akkermans and Schwartz 2003, Cooper 2006, Ur 2010, and Lebeau 2011, while Kuhrt 1995 and Van de Mieroop 2007 provide further historical information. Several of the articles in Sasson 1995 elaborate on a number of subjects introduced here.

Notes

- 1 A similar rejection of religious ideology has been hypothesized for Southern Mesopotamia and may be illustrated by the abandonment of the Uruk IV Eanna Temple complex (Staubwasser and Weiss 2006).
- 2 Subartu is a geographical term that is used both generally for the area to the “North” (of Sumer and Akkad) and more narrowly, to refer to the area of the East Tigris in the dry-farming region. For discussion, see Sallaberger 2007, fn. 24, Steinkeller 1993: 77, Weiss 1986, and Michalowski 1986.

CHAPTER 3

The Old Assyrian Period (20th–18th Century BCE)

Klaas R. Veenhof

The Old Assyrian Period began when Ashur, around 2025 BCE, became independent after the empire of the Third Dynasty of Ur had lost control of its “periphery,” in the northwestern edge of which Ashur was located. The local elite presumably took control, somehow a local ruler emerged, and the city-state Ashur was born; Assyria as a territorial state only took shape centuries later. How long this period lasted depends on the definition of “Old Assyrian.” If one equates it with the period during which the “native,” so-called Old Assyrian “Puzur-Aššur dynasty” ruled, it lasted until 1809 BCE, when the Amorite king Šamši-Adad took the city. But we may include the 18th century BCE, because the essence of Ashur’s cultural identity and political institutions, described below, somehow survived this conquest, although in recognition of certain differences and developments we may call it the “Later Old Assyrian Period.” The basis for such distinctions, however, also with regard to what this volume calls the “Transition Period” (17th–16th century BCE), is weak because we do not really know what happened after 1760 BCE.

Sources, Rulers, and Chronology

We have only a few, usually short inscriptions of Ashur’s own rulers, with very little information on the political history. The chronological skeleton is provided by the Assyrian King List (AKL; see [Table 3.1](#)) and the lists of annually appointed *līmum* officials, which we call “Eponym Lists,” found at Kaniš (KEL A-G). They cover, almost without gaps, the period between ca. 1974 BCE and the end of the 18th century BCE (middle chronology). Their data can be correlated with an “Eponymic Chronicle” (Biro 1985) found at Mari, which covers nearly hundred years until ca. 1775 BCE and adds short historical notes to the names of many eponyms. But its focus on the exploits of Šamši-Adad and his ancestors – it was perhaps used in ceremonies honoring them – explains the absence of data on Ashur, at least as far as it is preserved. In Ashur itself (Veenhof 2008a: 35–41) centuries of restoration and rebuilding have left few traces of the Old Assyrian levels of the upper city. Of Assur’s temple and of the so-called “old palace” only scanty remains,

incomplete ground plans, and foundation trenches are preserved. A few inscriptions and inscribed bricks mention building activities of the early rulers, but we lack archives to inform us on the political history. In the lower town the excavators hardly touched the level of this period. Only a few graves were found (Hockmann 2010: graves nos. 36(?), 37, 53), not a single house was excavated (Miglus 1996: 55), and no private archives have been found. The vast majority of the Old Assyrian texts we know originate from the lower city of Kaniš, in Central Anatolia, the seat of an Assyrian trading colony (called *kārum* Kaniš) and the administrative center of a colonial network (Veenhof 1995b). The ca. 23,000 cuneiform texts from the archives of the traders living there provide information on Ashur, especially in letters sent from there. But their focus on trade, commerce, and the activities and lives of the families of the traders makes information on the political history of the city remarkably hard to come by. What we learn about the City Assembly, its officials, and the rulers of Ashur is embodied in letters and judicial records that nearly all deal with issues related to trade and finances. Only a few documents provide some insight into commercial and economic politics, and political history is hardly touched.

Table 3.1 The Old Assyrian part of the Assyrian King List

27	Sulili/Sulê	son of Aminu			
28	Kikkiya				
29	Akiya				
30	Puzur-Aššur (I)				
31	Šalim-aḫum	(son of 30)			
32	Ilušuma	(son of 31)			
	A total of 6 kings whose year-eponyms have not been marked/ found.				
33	Erišum (I)	son of 32	40	years	ca. 1974–1935
34	Ikunum	son of 33	[14]	years	ca. 1934–1921
35	Šarru-kin	son of 34	[40]	years	ca. 1920–1881
36	Puzur-Aššur (II)	son of 35	[8]	years	ca. 1880–1873

37	Naram-Sin	son of 36	(4)4?	years	ca. 1872–1829?
38	Erišum (II)	son of 37	(20?)	years	ca. 1828?–1809

Šamši-Adad, son of Ilu-kabkabu, went to Karduniaš in the time of Naram-Sin.* During the eponymy of Ibni-Adad Šamši-Adad came up from Karduniaš, he conquered Ekallatum and resided three years in Ekallatum. During the eponymy of Atamar-Ištar Šamši-Adad came up from Ekallatum and removed Erišum (II), son of Naram-Sin, from the throne.

39	Šamši-Adad I		33	years	ca. 1808–1776
40	Išme-Dagan	son of 39	40	years	ca. 1775–1736
41	Aššur-dugul	“son of nobody”	6	years	

*This is not no. 37, but a king of Ešnunna, Ashur's southern rival in this period.

Table 3.1's list of the rulers of Ashur, a skeleton of the history, is based on the Assyrian King List (AKL), where by a modern numbering they figure as nos. 27–41, but the length of their reigns is only recorded beginning with no. 33, Erišum I. With his accession the institution of the eponymous *līmum*-officials started, whose list apparently served as source for the figures. One list of them (KEL A = Veenhof 2003a) mentions the accession of the rulers and allows the restoration of the damaged figures for rulers 34–6. Those for 37 (which ends in 4) and 38, whose reign was cut short by Šamši-Adad's conquest, are unknown. But with the help of statements about the temporal distance between work on the same temple by successive Old Assyrian rulers (called "Distanzangaben"; see Veenhof 2003a: 51–2; Janssen 2006, 2009, and 2012) we can calculate that together they reigned more than sixty years. Their suggested figures are between round brackets, as are the patronymics of rulers 31 and 32, taken from original inscriptions.

Some problems remain due to small breaks in the eponym lists and the interpretation of the "Distanzangaben," which prompted Barjamovic et al. 2012: 26–7 to start the reign of ruler 33 five years earlier, in 1969 BCE.

We know nothing of rulers 27 and 29, and 28 is only mentioned as the builder of the city-wall by a later Assyrian king, who may have found an inscription of him or wished to stress the wall's early date. No. 27 connects the Old Assyrian rulers with the dynasty of Šamši-Adad I (39), whose ancestors, called "kings who are forefathers," were inserted secondarily and in reversed order before him.¹ His "father" Aminum appears again as ruler no. 17 and as brother of Šamši-Adad I, which is impossible, since the latter was born around the time Aminum died. Who Aminum was and where he reigned is still unclear. If the link between Sulili/Sulê and Aminum is secondary, the former might have been Ashur's first ruler, but we lack evidence for it. That a much later text (Lambert 1985) presents him as the first ruler of a new Old Assyrian dynasty by stating: "From the beginning to the appearance (?) of the dynasty of Sulili, up to the dynasty of [...]," is probably simply a reflection of what AKL mentions. Identifying him with the elusive ruler Šilulu, only known from his seal, used by a later namesake (RIMA 1: 12f.), is risky.

Ruler 30 figures as the first ancestor in the genealogies of later rulers and was the founder of the Old Assyrian dynasty, which comprised an unbroken series of nine rulers. How long nos. 30–2 ruled is unknown, but if Ashur became an independent city-state soon after ca. 2025 BCE the three of them, perhaps together with one or more of rulers 27–9, should have ruled ca. fifty years, which is very well possible. How Puzur-Aššur I conquered the throne is unknown. We have no information on ruler 40 after 1761 BCE, when the archives of Mari stop, and a reign of forty years is suspiciously long. After ruler 41 the list mentions six kings, usurpers ("sons of nobody"), who ruled for a very short period, but a presumably older recension of AKL (Grayson

1981: 115, § 3.10) mentions instead of ruler 41 two other rulers, the first of which, Mut-Aškur, is attested as grown-up son of no. 40. The historical tradition was confused and the legitimacy of certain rulers disputed. AKL omits a ruler Puzur-Sîn, perhaps from the end of the 18th century BCE, who in his inscription boasts of having removed buildings of Šamši-Adad I and his grandson, “men of non-Assyrian blood,” that infringed upon the shrines of the god Assur.

Disturbing is that the two eponyms mentioned in AKL as those of the years in which Šamši-Adad made his conquests do not figure in the eponym list and that the short note in AKL on Šamši-Adad’s career is a later addition, because it uses “Karduniaš,” a later name for Babylonia. This raises doubts about the reliability of AKL, but the basic facts are true: Ashur was conquered by Šamši-Adad, and we know from other sources that Ešnunna posed a threat. The Mari Chronicle mentions the year of Šamši-Adad’s birth (ca. 1850 BCE) and his succession of his father, fifteen years later, and texts from Mari document the year of his death, 1776 BCE, and his succession by Išme-Dagan. The latter’s reign until 1762 BCE is well documented, but what happened afterwards is unknown due to a lack of written sources.

Old Assyrian History

As mentioned we know almost nothing of Ashur’s early political history. Neither royal inscriptions nor archival texts from *kārum* Kaniš describe historical events, and contacts with other Mesopotamian cities or rulers are not mentioned (relations with cities and rulers in Anatolia, who were trading partners of the Assyrian merchants and with whom the latter concluded treaties, are a different matter; see Veenhof 2008a: ch. V). Dating by eponyms and not by year-names (as in Babylonia) deprives us of the historical data contained in the latter. The inscriptions we have, from rulers 31–34 (RIMA 1: 14–46), deal only with Ashur itself and mention the building of temples, of Assur (by Šalim-aḥum and Erišum I), Ištar (by Ilušuma, confirmed by inscribed bricks found in levels E–D), Adad (by Erišum I and Ikunum), and perhaps Nabium (by Ikunum). Later kings also mention the work of Sargon (Šarru-kin) and Išme-Dagan, but their own inscriptions have not survived. We also hear about a building called “Step Gate” (*mušlālum*), behind the temple of Assur, the place where the court met in the presence of the statues of the seven divine judges (RIMA 1, 20: 26–9). Ilušuma reports that he led the water from “two springs, which the god Assur had opened for me in Mount Abiḥ” (a northern spur of the Jebel Ḥamrin) through two gates into the city.

Work on Ashur’s fortifications, important now that the city had gained

independence, receives less attention. Ilušuma used the water of the just-mentioned wells to make bricks for the city wall and he and his son Erišum I mention a wall (part of the city wall?), which the former had “laid out crosswise(?)” and the latter raised higher than his father (RIMA 1: 17 and 23). A king from ca. 1400 BCE writes that before him Kikkiya, Ikunum and Sargon I had built the city wall. A letter to *kārum* Kaniš by its representatives in Ashur (called *nībum*) shows that the colonies, by decision of the City Assembly, had to contribute to the costs of keeping it in good repair (Dercksen 2004a: 62–5).

Two early inscriptions, one of Ilušuma, from shortly after 2000 BCE, and one of Erišum I, a generation later, provide important information on the economic policy of the city (RIMA I: 15 and 22–3). The first, after mentioning the building of Ištār’s temple, states:

I established the *addurārum* of the Akkadians and their children. I washed their copper. I established their *addurārum* from the front of the Lagoon and Ur and Nippur, Awal and Kismar, Der of the god Ištaran, until the City (=Ashur).

The meaning of these words depends on the interpretation of *addurārum*. This term also appears in the inscriptions of Erišum I, who writes:

When I applied myself to the work (on the Assur temple), my city obeyed me and I realized the *addurārum* of silver, gold, copper, tin, barley, wool, even until bran and chaff.

Both inscriptions fit the tradition of early kings boasting of the prosperity of their city by mentioning favorable market prices and wages obtained during their reign. This is clear with Erišum, where *addurārum* must mean free circulation of and access to the goods mentioned, with a regular supply and fair prices as result. In the first inscription “the *addurārum* of the Akkadians(= Babylonians) and their children,” if one applied the meaning current in Babylonia (see Charpin 1987), would mean that the Babylonians were freed from the consequences of unpaid debts (owed to the Assyrians?), in particular in copper, which were perhaps “washed off.”² But then the measure would have been in force over a very large area, and Ashur was not a producer of or a market for copper. Moreover, such cancellations of debts were ad hoc measures with only retroactive force and would not apply to “the Akkadians and their children.” This suggests that *addurārum* here also refers to free circulation, perhaps realized by tax exemption, free access, and market rights, granted to the Babylonians coming to Ashur, now and in the future (see Larsen 1976: 63–78 and Veenhof 2008a: 126–30).

Economic history

Interpreted in this way both inscriptions reveal that at an early stage Ashur took measures meant to promote its position as a trading city, visited by foreign merchants who came to sell and buy. This agrees with evidence of the archival texts found in Ashur's colony in Kaniš: Ashur played a key role in the international trade, importing into Anatolia tin, woolen textiles, and lapis lazuli, and bringing back from there gold and especially silver (Veenhof 2010). The latter was used to buy what the Babylonians brought to Ashur, copper from Oman and woolen textiles for export to Anatolia, and to pay for the large quantities of tin and lapis lazuli sold by traders arriving from Susa in Elam (Figure 3.1). The cities mentioned by Ilušuma indicate how these goods reached Ashur, with Babylonian caravans that crossed to the east of the Tigris and proceeded via Der, Awal (where the Diyala was crossed) and Kismar, following the road along the foothills of the Zagros, which would also be used by caravans from Susa. The commercial purpose of the measures is clear from Erišum's inscription. Unlike other kings, who only mention prices of basic subsistence goods, he includes silver, gold, copper, and tin, which played a key role in the trade.

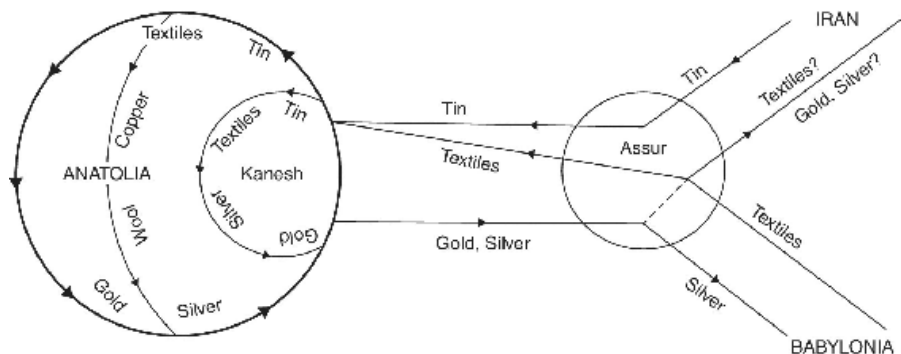


Figure 3.1 Schematic illustration of the movement of goods in the Old Assyrian overland trade

(drawing by K. R. Veenhof).

If Ashur was above all a trading city, a kind of central place in a wider international network that linked southern Mesopotamia and Elam with Anatolia (Larsen 1987), its power was primarily economic. It bought, supplied, exchanged, and shipped valuable and essential goods (tin for the production of bronze) based on its international contacts, commercial and organizational skills, capital, and good communications and transport infrastructure. The history of ancient Ashur was closely linked to its role in the international trade, which is also reflected in the concerns and composition of the City Assembly, in which merchants seem to have played an important role.

The overland trade created much work and income and supplied the city and its inhabitants with lots of silver. The economic importance of the goods

imported to Anatolia (tin and textiles) was the basis of Ashur's success in a land where Assyrian traders could not follow the flag. Mutual economic interests and the observation of what was agreed on in the treaties (called "oaths") – import taxes and right of preemption for the local rulers; residence and extraterritorial rights, security of caravans, and compensation for losses for the Assyrians – secured Ashur's position abroad (Veenhof 2008a: ch. V).

There was of course more to Old Assyrian history, but with a size of no more than ca. 40 ha and perhaps five to eight thousand inhabitants (a fair number of which lived in the colonies or traveled in Anatolia), Ashur's military power must have been limited. A royal palace and military institutions are remarkably absent from the sources and there are no indications for territorial gains during this period. None of the cities in its neighborhood were subjected to Ashur and no political interactions with Ashur's southern neighbors, such as Ešnunna and the city of Sippar, are documented. "Akkadians," i.e. Babylonians, only occur as importers of textiles and, together with the Subaraeans and Amorites living northeast and northwest of Ashur, as people to whom by decision of the City no gold was to be sold. A treaty with a minor ruler in Southern Anatolia stipulated, moreover, that "Akkadians" who came to his town (to trade) had to be seized and extradited to the Assyrians (Günbattı 2004: 250, note 8, lines 11–15).

With a limited territory, mainly the valley of the Tigris and the southern part of a triangle between the Tigris and the Lower Zab, and situated at the edge of the 200 mm isohyet zone, the city-state probably was able to feed its population, but without prospects of creating agricultural surpluses (Dercksen 2004b: 155–60). Assyrian traders used their silver to buy barley and wool, the latter from the Suhū-nomads who grazed their sheep west of the city, in the area of the Wadi Tharthar.

Ashur's role in the international overland trade may not have been a completely new phenomenon. Its strategic location near the point where the road coming from the southeast crossed the Tigris, and perhaps its important temples, may have stimulated commercial activity at an early stage (Veenhof 2008a: 122–5). How early is difficult to say. The use of tin, shipped in great quantities by the Old Assyrians caravans, for bronze making started much earlier, as the texts from Ebla in Northern Syria (24th century BCE) show. One wonders how this rare metal, apparently imported into Mesopotamia (together with lapis lazuli) from mining areas northeast of Iran (Dercksen 2005a: 19), reached Syria and Anatolia before 2000 BCE. It is possible that Ashur already then played a role in this trade. We know from inscriptions that the Old Akkadian king Naram-Sin (ca. 2275 BCE) made his presence felt in northern Mesopotamia, in Nineveh and in Nagar (*Tell Brak*) in the Jezira, and penetrated all the way to the sources of the Euphrates and Tigris and to the city of Ḫaḫḫum (near Samsat), where caravans used to cross the Euphrates (Veenhof 2008b: 122–3).³ But it is not warranted to use the later epic tale

“King of Battle” (Westenholz 1997: 102–39), about a campaign by Sargon of Akkad to help traders in the central Anatolian city of Buruṣḫanda, as proof of early commercial penetration, let alone colonial settlement in Anatolia. It may reflect memories of early trading contacts, but seems to be construed on the basis of the realities of the later Old Assyrian commercial penetration into Anatolia, when Buruṣḫanda harbored an important Assyrian colony. Ashur may have played a role in the trade in tin and textiles under the Ur III Empire, to which it belonged, but we have no sources on Ashur’s economy during that period, and a venture trade into Anatolia or its borderland by caravans visiting market towns and emporia at particular times, without colonial settlement, is difficult to trace without relevant texts.

The inscriptions of Iluṣuma and Eriṣum I show that Ashur’s early rulers took measures to attract foreign traders and to facilitate the exchange of goods. Written evidence for the trade, however, only becomes available during the last decades of the 20th century BCE, in the form of texts preserved in the archives of *kārum* Kaniš. The oldest dated contract we know of is from ca. 1933 BCE, excerpted in a memorandum on unpaid debts (AKT 6, 1: 24–9); the oldest preserved contract is six years later, and in general we have not many dated records before ca. 1900. This may be due to an initially more limited commercial activity and colonial settlement, which produced fewer dated records (usually debt-notes), to the removal of old records, or perhaps to the fact that the first city where the traders settled was not Kaniš, but perhaps the more southern Ḫaḫḫum. Still, Assyrian colonial presence in Anatolia must have started early, because broken envelopes with impressions of the seal of Eriṣum I were found in *kārum* Kaniš, presumably from letters to Assyrians living there (Veenhof 2003a: 41–2). Eriṣum I clearly was an important ruler in the early phase of the trade, as is demonstrated by his above-mentioned inscription, and by the fact that the institution of *līmum*, the director of the City Hall (the financial and economic center of the city, see below), started with his accession.

The growing prosperity of Ashur had effects on the architecture of the city. The projects of early rulers to restore and enlarge temples required space in the upper city, and this is reflected in two inscriptions. Iluṣuma, reporting on his work on the Iṣtar temple (RIMA 1: 17, lines 23–9), writes: “Crosswise(?) I laid out a new wall and divided houses for my city.” And his son Eriṣum I, in connection with the enlargement of the Assur temple, states (RIMA 1: 23, lines 33–44): “With the help of Assur I cleared houses from the Sheep Gate to the People’s Gate,” an action he describes in another inscription as “I reserved terrain for Assur.” It seems that the ruler expropriated houses and their premises because he needed the terrain for extending the area of the Assur temple, while the new wall allowed him to assign (new) house-plots to the (growing number of) inhabitants (Veenhof 2011: § 1). Although little is known of the Old Assyrian stratum in the lower city, enough was apparently

found to allow Miglus (1996: 55) to state that the residential area must have reached the city wall during the Old Assyrian period.

From Sargon to Erišum II

Judging from the number and variety of texts the Assyrian trade peaked during the reign of Sargon (ca. 1920–1881 BCE). Barjamovic et al. 2012: ch. 3 document the massive increase of texts starting shortly before eponymy year 80 and ending fairly soon after eponymy year 110. The first joint-stock partnerships (in Assyrian *naruqqum*, “money bag”), with a capital of ca. 15 kilograms of gold, contributed by numerous investors and entrusted to an experienced trader for ten to twelve years (Larsen 1999; Dercksen 2004a: 83–9), are from Sargon’s reign. They reveal the growing sophistication of the trade and its expansion, with more capital, more men, and more trading stations, which allowed a wider range of action in Anatolia. Assyrian traders eventually settled down in thirty colonies (*kārum*) and smaller trading stations (*wabartum*), spread out over the whole of central Anatolia (see Barjamovic 2011) and another ten along the caravan roads in northern Mesopotamia, ranging from the upper course of the Tigris to Uršu, west of the Euphrates (Veenhof 2008b; see for their correspondence Michel 2001: ch. 1).

This development had many consequences. It required more treaties with local Anatolian rulers, more personnel, in particular “traveling agents” (*tamkārum*) who took goods in commission and signed dated debt-notes for the silver they would have to pay after a fixed term (usually between a few weeks and a year). This credit system demanded new legal instruments to provide sureties, solve problems, and settle accounts. Their presence in a wider area and their excellent transport facilities offered the Assyrians also the opportunity to apply themselves to the inner-Anatolian trade in copper (see Dercksen 1996) and wool, to make additional profit, also by indirect exchange. This development also affected the administration of the Assyrian colonial system, centered in the “*kārum* office” in Kaniš. It kept in touch with the Assyrian trading posts (via “messengers of the *kārum*”; Veenhof 2008c: 224–30), maintained contacts with the Anatolian rulers (if there were problems or treaties had to be renewed; see Michel 2001: ch. 2), and regulated (e.g. by fixing the rate of the default interest) and taxed activities of individual traders. As law-court the “*kārum* office” handled conflicts between its members, who could appeal to it to reverse decisions made by other colonies, and it maintained contact with the government of Ashur, of which it was a kind of colonial extension and whose decisions it had to communicate and implement. Finally, it made more Assyrian women follow their husbands to Anatolia, where a colonial family life emerged and Assyrian traders also started to marry Anatolian girls.

The results are observable in the thousands of records from the heyday of the trade, between ca. 1900 and 1860 BCE, but how it took shape is difficult to say for lack of early texts. We do not know when or why new colonies and trading stations were created or when the trade in copper (linked with the founding of colonies in or near the mining areas in the north) started to flourish. Individual decisions – whether a trader’s family would move to the colonies, where a trader would settle down, and whether his focus would shift from the import trade to the local copper trade – also played a role.

The favorable conditions are reflected in the turnover of the trade. Unable to give exact figures, because the caravan documents and letters are not dated, we observe that each year a few thousand expensive woolen textiles and tons of tin were imported into Anatolia, from where hundreds of kilos of silver and more modest quantities of gold reached Ashur. Ashur became a rich city, where many people worked and earned wages to meet the requirements of the caravan trade, including women weaving textiles, personnel serving in the caravans, and craftsmen that produced each year the harness for hundreds of caravan donkeys, raised and trained in a paddock outside the city. The temples shared in this prosperity thanks to the many votive gifts and profitable investments in the trade, money or merchandise entrusted to reliable traders (Dercksen 1997). In addition many foreign traders visited the city, because most of the textiles and the tin and lapis lazuli exported to Anatolia were first brought to Ashur. But there is never mention of a *kārum* Ashur, which might imply that foreign merchants could visit the city and do business there, but were not settled (or allowed to settle) in Ashur. Miglus (1996: 59) observes at the end of the Old Assyrian Period a substantial increase of the city area. Texts support this picture by mentioning how traders in Ashur built expensive new houses, apparently a status symbol for a successful trader, or bought them as investments (Veenhof 2011).

The political developments of this period are not known, but some private letters of the rulers Ikunum and Sargon (analyzed in Larsen 1976: 132–44) show that they too invested in the trade. That Sargon and his grandson Naram-Sin chose the same names (including their divine determinatives!) as two famous “emperors” of the Old Akkadian empire (also father and grandson), probably inspired by literary tales about the exploits of these kings, indicates their ambitions. One of these tales is an Old Assyrian text celebrating the memory of the great Sargon. Perhaps, as Dercksen (2005b) suggests, members of the Puzur-Aššur dynasty considered Sargon and Naram-Sin their remote ancestors.

After ca. 1860 BCE, when many of the prominent traders died or returned to Ashur in their old age and their businesses were split up among their sons, we witness a general and fairly rapid decrease in the number of texts from the colony in Kaniš. Archives covering the last decades of the period *kārum* Kaniš level II, which lasted until ca. 1835 BCE, are very rare. An explanation

is not easy to find – we probably have to take into account a combination of social, legal, and commercial factors, as Barjamovic et al. 2012: 64–73 suggests, a study to which the reader is referred for details. One of the reasons was apparently that traders moved to other important colonies in the north and west of Anatolia (such as Buruṣḫanda and Durḫumit, the center of the copper trade). This explains the discovery in Kaniš of houses with archives *in situ*, but with few records of the last two decades of the level II period. The end of this period, when Kaniš was destroyed, no doubt due to political rivalry and war in central Anatolia, came in ca. 1835 BCE.

It has long been assumed that this destruction was followed by an interval of perhaps thirty years before the beginning of *kārum* Kaniš level Ib (contemporary with level 7 on the city-mound), when city and colony experienced a revival. New discoveries of texts dating only a few years after the end of level II now show that the interval was only a few years. This agrees with the fact, established by dendrochronological analysis, that the younger so-called “palace of Waršama” on the city-mound of Kaniš, which dominated this period, was built around 1832 BCE. Because the new texts are still unpublished and come from only one or two houses, the nature and size of this revival remain unknown.

Ashur under Šamši-Adad I and Išme-Dagan

Due to a lack of written sources our picture of Ashur after ca. 1835 BCE, during the reigns of Naram-Sin and Erišum II, is extremely sketchy. These years saw the gradual rise of the Amorite king Samsi-Addu (Šamši-Adad in the Assyrian King List), who succeeded his father Ila-kabkabuhu around this time. The seat of his dynasty may have been Ekallatum, ca. 30 km north of Ashur and west of the Tigris, the city he later (re)conquered (see Ziegler 2002: 217–20), but Durand believes it was Akkad (see Charpin 2004a: 148–150). The Mari Chronicle (Biro 1985) reveals that Šamši-Adad had a powerful rival in Ešnunna under king Ipiq-Adad II, who ruled until ca. 1818 BCE, and under his successor Naram-Sin, who may have reigned for ca. ten years. Šamši-Adad was forced to seek refuge in (or return to?) Babylonia, but in ca. 1811 BCE he came back, conquered Ekallatum, which became his residence, and three years later Ashur, removing Erišum II. He then started to extend his power over the whole Jezira, which culminated in the defeat of Yaḥḏun-Lim of Mari in ca. 1792 BCE. Later he also conquered cities east and north of Ashur (Arrapha, Qabra, Urbil, Nurrugum/Nineveh) and along the upper course of the Tigris (Mardaman, Šimanum), so that in the end he ruled most of the region between the Tigris and the Euphrates. In ca. 1785 BCE he appointed his eldest son Išme-Dagan as vice-roy of Ekallatum. He ruled a realm called “the Tigris valley” that included Ashur and reached until the

Jebel Sinjar in the north. Šamši-Adad made the city of Šeḫna, in the land of Apum (modern Tell Leilan, in the eastern part of the Khabur Triangle), his power base and renamed it Šubat-Enlil. This shows the importance he attached to the control of the Jezira, crossed by the Assyrian caravans.

With Šamši-Adad I we enter a period of intense political and military activity, of conquests, crises, and changing alliances, with a number of important players, well documented (especially after ca. 1800 BCE) by the palace archives of Mari. In this hectic period Ashur seems to have managed to remain itself and to continue its trade, but the political shifts and wars of course had an impact. Since the focus here is on Ashur, I refer the reader to the overviews of the complicated historical developments of this period in Charpin-Ziegler 2003 and Charpin 2004a, and for the history of Ekallatum to Ziegler 2002 (see map, [Figure 3.2](#)).

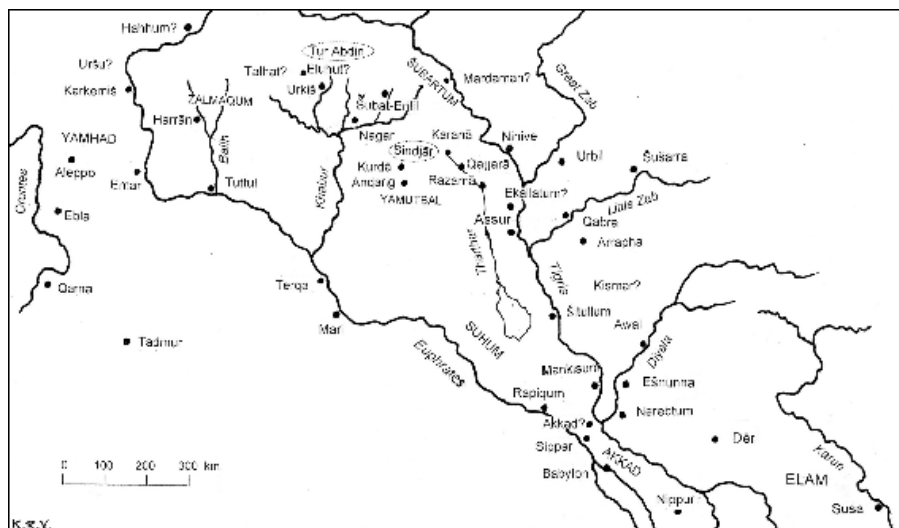


Figure 3.2 Assur and the political world of Northern Mesopotamia during the Šamši-Adad period

(drawing by K. R. Veenhof).

As ruler of Assur Šamši-Adad I rebuilt the Assur and the Anu-Adad temples (RIMA 1, 80–1). The titles he uses are informative (Charpin 1984: 50–3). In the inscription RIMA 1: 48–51 he calls himself “king of the universe, builder of Assur’s temple, pacifier of the land between Tigris and Euphrates,” but on inscribed bricks he adheres to the traditional title “steward (ensí) of Assur,” to which in his seal inscription (RIMA 1, 61, 10) he adds “beloved of Assur.” In other inscriptions this title is preceded by “appointee of the god Enlil,” which refers to the supreme Mesopotamian god as the source of his authority, a claim that also found expression in his reconstruction of the Assur temple, where (according to Miglus 2001⁴) he constructed two sanctuaries under one roof, one for Enlil and one for Assur. Šamši-Adad respected Ashur, a city

“full of gods,” as he states in a letter (Charpin 2004a: 379), and stayed there on occasion to take part in religious ceremonies (Charpin 2004b: 378–80). But he did not make it his residence, probably, as suggested by Ziegler (2002: 213–20), because such a “divine city,” with Assur as its real king and a powerful City Assembly, was unattractive as a royal seat of power.

Ashur’s trade must have been important for Šamši-Adad’s empire and it may have profited from his pacification of the Jezira. During his reign we meet for the first time an official called “overseer of the merchants” (*ugula dam.gàr*) and under his son an “overseer of the merchants of Ashur” (ARMT 26, 342). Was he a royal appointee, to monitor the trade, or had Ashur’s merchants, confronted with a new, “foreign” ruler, designated one of their own as representative and leader (Veenhof 2008a: 140–1)? Ashur on occasion had to supply soldiers to the king, but seems to have preserved an internal autonomy; it is mentioned as a separate political entity alongside the land Ekallatum. But a recently published letter from Kaniš (Günbattu 2014: 87–100) shows that the king decided on foreign politics. The request of the Anatolian king of Ḫarsamna (a rival of Kaniš) to stop the military support of his opponent, the king of Zalpa, was rejected by Šamši-Adad shortly before he died in 1776 BCE. The representatives of the traders in Ashur, who tried to convince him, were told: “Do not intervene between us great kings!”

Išme-Dagan, although boasting “I hold the Elamites and the ruler of Ešnunna with my reins” (ARMT 4, 20), had much less power and went through a series of crises, but proved a resilient survivor. He cared for Ashur and its cults, occasionally stayed in the city, and was active as a builder (RIMA 1: 95); his wife’s name, Lamassi-Aššur, expresses devotion for the god and city. After Šamši-Adad’s death the western part of his empire was lost to Zimrilim of Mari, and many rulers in the area of the Jebel Sinjar and Jezira became Zimrilim’s vassals; but some remained allied with Išme-Dagan, still king of “the Tigris Valley.” The interest of Zimrilim and his allies in Išme-Dagan’s realm explains the many references to Ekallatum and Ashur in the political correspondence found at Mari (especially in letters published in ARMT 26/2, including diplomatic reports sent from Babylon; cf. Charpin 2004b: 381, note 45). They are the main source of our knowledge of this period.

In ca. 1772 BCE the army of Ešnunna’s king Ibal-pi-El II marched northward, occupied Ashur, Ekallatum, and Qaṭṭara, and installed itself in Šubat-Enlil, a move that made Išme-Dagan take refuge in Babylon. Some years later, in ca. 1765 BCE, after Zimrilim and his allies had pushed Ešnunna back, an Elamite army marched north and after conquering Ešnunna and Ekallatum also seized Šubat-Enlil, “devouring all of Šubartum” (the traditional name for the eastern part of the Jezira), as a letter describes it. Išme-Dagan was taught a harsh lesson by the king of Elam, and there even was a plan to put his son, Mut-Aškur (attested as commander of troops of Ekallatum and Ashur in ARMT 26, 411), on the throne. But Išme-Dagan survived and, probably with the

support of Babylon, managed to retake Ekallatum. Eventually the Elamites, attacked from the south by Hammurabi of Babylon and faced by a united front of rulers in the north, led by the king of Mari and joined by Išme-Dagan, drew back. In the aftermath of this war Išme-Dagan made a treaty with Ešnunna and managed to strengthen his position by extending his power south of the Jebel Sinjar. But in 1763 BCE, after having lost the support of Ešnunna, he again fled to Babylonia. When a year later the lingering conflict between Ešnunna and Babylon erupted Hammurabi defeated Ešnunna and “annexed the land of the Tigris valley until Šubartum.” The next year he vanquished not only Mari, but also “various cities of Šubartum and Ekallatum.” These conquests must have included the territory lost by his ally Išme-Dagan (who was still staying in Babylonia; Charpin–Ziegler 2003: 243), and also Ashur. Išme-Dagan subsequently may have regained the throne of Ekallatum, but we lack all information, since the palace archives of Mari come to an end. Did he actually reign twenty-five years longer; do the forty years mentioned in the King List include his ten years as viceroy of Ekallatum; or is the round figure of forty anyhow suspect? As for Ashur, Hammurabi’s opaque words in the prologue of his “Codex” (col. iv 53–8), “I guided the people (*ammī*) properly and returned to Ashur its benevolent protective spirit,” suggest that he respected Ashur and its civic institutions.

Ashur’s trade seems to have somehow continued in these hectic years. A few letters sent from Ashur to Qaṭṭara (OBTR 33 and 122) mention products from Kaniš. An important trader in Ashur, in his correspondence with the “overseer of the traders in Mari,” claimed that just like his addressee was a “man of name” in Mari, he was one in Ashur and Kaniš (Durand 2001). But there must have been interruptions and problems. A letter (ARMT 26, 315: 80–3; cf. 316: 19’–21’) reports that in 1765 BCE, after the Elamites had installed themselves in Šeḫna, the Assyrian traders there had been forced to leave. Other letters from this time, found at Mari (ARMT 26, 432 and A 285; Charpin–Durand 1997: 385), talk about an Assyrian caravan of 300 donkeys that departed from Ekallatum and was allowed to enter Karana (east of the Jebel Sinjar), from where fifty donkeys traveled on to Kaniš. The others, who wished to go west, to Kurda, were retained and could not leave without a written permit of its king. Two others letters (ARMT 26, 433 and 436), dealing with the same incident, reveal that admittance and passage of traders required a formal announcement from Ashur. The correspondence reflects the problems of caravans crossing political boundaries, in this case from Išme-Dagan’s kingdom of Ekallatum into the territory ruled by vassals of Zimrilim of Mari such as the ruler of Karana, a rival of Kurda. The letters show that, if certain conditions were met, traders and their caravans nevertheless could travel; as another letter from Mari states, “a trader crosses (territories) in war and in peace.”

A picture of Old Assyrian trade in this period from the Anatolian point of

view is provided by a few hundred texts found in *kārum* Kaniš level Ib, supplemented by a few dozen texts from Assyrian colonies at Ḫattuša and Ališar (ancient Amkuwa, about halfway between Kaniš and Ḫattuša; see Dercksen 2001). They show that the Assyrian colonial system still functioned and even some new colonies appeared, but some others are no longer attested or became less important. The recently published treaties from this period, concluded with the cities of Ḫaḫḫum and Kaniš (Veenhof 2008a: ch. V, and 2008d; their dates are unfortunately unknown), show that the import trade continued and that the Assyrians tried to maintain their position. Some stipulations reveal that their position was weaker and that more protection against high-handed actions of Anatolian kings and citizens was considered necessary. The archival texts we have suggest that much less tin was imported, new types of textiles appear, and joint-stock companies are absent. Barjamovic et al. 2012: 73–80 assume that there was more venture trade, based on short-term partnerships, and that many traders became permanent residents of Anatolian towns and got involved in exchange within Anatolia, not only in copper and wool but also in agricultural products. But there were also traders, called “those traveling the road to Ashur,” who maintained the contact with Ashur and must have taken care of the imports, even though the evidence for them is very limited. The much smaller number of Assyrian texts from Kaniš, whose material culture does not reveal stagnation and impoverishment, suggests that local Anatolian traders had taken over part of the business, but much remains unclear.

After Išme-Dagan

Ashur’s trade in the following years is documented by a number of texts found in Sippar. Some document the activities of an Assyrian trader settled there and the regular contacts that existed between Sippar and Ashur, while others show that Babylonian traders visited Ashur (Veenhof 1991). Important is the (heavily damaged) treaty concluded in ca. 1745 BCE with Till-Abnû, the king of Šeḫna, the capital of the land of Apum (Eidem 1991). As far as preserved it mentions caravan traffic, a transit tax per donkey, payments of copper, and perhaps a compensation for losses. The Assyrian partners are the city of Ashur, Assyrians “going up and down” (in caravans), and resident Assyrian traders, designated as the “*kārum* of Šeḫna.” Archival texts from this city (Eidem 2008: 329–31) confirm the existence of a commercial establishment called “the house of the servant of Ashur,” possibly the office of the resident Assyrian official. The function of the earlier “*kārum* Apum” (Veenhof 2008a: 155, 2) is now taken over by nearby Šeḫna = Šubat-Enlil, perhaps because it had been made a regional center by Šamši-Adad. Caravan routes apparently could change due to political developments (see Guichard 2008).

In the 18th century BCE the Anatolian political scene also changed. Due to warfare and conquests a network of mostly small, often rivaling Anatolian city-states was gradually replaced by a few dominant territorial states, which in due course would give way to the Old Hittite state (see Miller 2001 and Barjamovic et al. 2012: 49–52). This must have affected the Assyrian trading network, although the trade continued under the aegis of new treaties, which stipulated that the Assyrians should be allowed to travel also in times of hostilities. After ca. 1750 BCE Kaniš came twice under the power of new rulers, first when Piṭḫana of Kuššara conquered the city, perhaps around ca. 1750 BCE, and a generation later, after Piṭḫana had been succeeded by his son Anitta, when a further unknown, “Zuzu, the great ruler of Alahzina,” took the city (see Veenhof 2008a: 143–6). But the archival texts from Kaniš do not reveal the impact of these changes.

Sources from Šeḫna show that after ca. 1750 BCE Babylonian influence in the north weakened, while that of the North-Syrian kingdom of Yamḥad, centered on Ḫalab (Aleppo), grew and made itself felt by military force and diplomatic action in the Jezira. The letters now also document the appearance of large bands of “robbers” (*ḫabbātum*), apparently laid off soldiers and mercenaries who roamed and raided the countryside. A unique letter from Kaniš, addressed by a local community of Assyrian traders to “the gods and the City (Ashur)” (Dercksen-Donbaz 2001), complains that “the roads have become full of hardship due to the *ḫabbātum* who control the mountains” and cause trouble for the caravans. In 1728 BCE a raid of the Babylonian king Samsu-iluna resulted in the destruction of Šeḫna, which meant the end of its archives and of information on the latest phase of the Assyrian trade.

The Political Institutions of Ashur

The ruler

In their inscriptions Ilušuma and Erišum I present themselves as self-confident rulers whose activities shaped the life and politics of the city. Practice documents from Kaniš, however, leave no doubt that the main administrative body in Ashur was “the City,”⁵ that is the City Assembly. In the oldest inscription (RIMA 1, 14) Šalim-aḫum already states that he built the temple of the god Assur “for his own well-being and that of his city.” It was the City Assembly that rendered verdicts and took decisions, while the ruler seems to have functioned as its chairman and executive officer (see for the verdicts Hertel 2013: 88–92, 381–8 and Appendix 2, and Veenhof 2015). He communicated them to the colonies in official letters (see Michel 2001: ch. 1)

that invariably start with the words: “Thus the Overseer, to *kārum* Kaniš: ‘The City has passed the following verdict ...’”. In the formulas of oaths and appeals the City comes first: “I swear by/bring my case before the City and the ruler/my lord!,” but the City and the ruler act as one authority. Erišum I (RIMA 1, 21: 55) designates the attorney granted to a plaintiff as “an attorney (*rābišum*; see Hertel 2013: 92–8) of the palace,” and he can be called “the attorney of my lord,” but we know (e.g. from AKT 6, 116) that a verdict of the City was the basis for obtaining one, so that he is also called “an attorney of the City” and can himself declare: “I am an attorney of the City” (EL 338: 10–11). The attorney’s authorization is “a strong tablet of the city,” also called “a tablet of the ruler” – both terms refer to the “*waklum* letter” he carried. The ruler may have appointed him after a decision by the City (Larsen 1976: 175–90). The ruler’s involvement in the administration of justice is understandable, since it was a Mesopotamian king’s divine mandate to uphold justice and equity – Erišum I (in RIMA 1: 21) speaks in detail about his concern for justice. The ruler is not called “(supreme) judge,” but his legal expertise was valuable and a unique letter (AKT 6, 113) reports how people in Ashur went to the ruler “as the constitutional expert” (Larsen) for advice on the proper procedure to be followed in the case of an appeal to the City.

The ruler also had to secure the peace and prosperity of his people. The latter was promoted by the measures strengthening Ashur position in the international trade, mentioned above, which were certainly not taken without the City Assembly. Military activities, either by the ruler or the City, are never mentioned. The duties in Ashur of the official called *laputtā’um* (nu.bànda), who during the Ur III period could also supervise military personnel (some translate his title as “captain”), are not clear. Dercksen (2004a: 65–72) finds some evidence for a relation with the City Hall and the temple of Assur, but there is no association with the military. Was Ashur’s early history peaceful, also because military conflicts would have harmed the overland trade?

Ashur’s ruler had various titles, analyzed in Larsen 1976: 109–59. In his seal inscription he figures as “ensí (Assyrian: *iššiakum*) of Aššur” (Figure 3.3a), where “Aššur” could refer to the god or the city. If the city is meant (Aššur^{ki}) the title would be similar to that of city governors appointed by the Ur III state, but the spelling ^dAššur (with the divine determinative) gradually becomes more current in Old Assyrian times (see Galter 1996). The variation shows that god and city were essentially the same, “divine Aššur.” As ensí the ruler is Assur’s steward, mandated by the god, who is the real king of the city. Inscribed seals of the contemporary rulers of Ešnunna explicitly state this about their god Tišpak, but in Ashur this only happened on the seal of the elusive ruler Šilulu (RIMA 1: 12f.). The ruler does not bear the title sanga, “priestly head of the temple” (which appears only centuries later), but his “ideological” association with the national god comes through in his promise in letters, “I will pray for you before Assur.”



Figure 3.3a Seal of Sargon, son of Ikunum, ensí of Assur. Photo of Kt c/k 1389 (T. Özgüç 2003: 19 no. 5). Photo kindly supplied by the excavator, T. Özgüç.

Citizens of Ashur designated the ruler as *rubā'um*, “the great one” (also used for Anatolian rulers), a title that expressed his status and authority as *primus inter pares*. Larsen (1976:126) suggests that the title refers to the ruler as head of the royal lineage; princes are called “son of the *rubā'um*.” We meet it in the formulas of oaths and appeals, mentioned above, and in references to “a tablet/the seal of the *rubā'um*,” and “silver/merchandise of the *rubā'um*.”

A third title is *bēlum*, “lord,” which qualifies the ruler as the one whose servants his citizens were. It nearly always has a possessive suffix to express a person’s relation to his ruler and is frequent in the combination “the City and my lord,” e.g. in the formula of appeal. In KEL A (Veenhof 2003a: 7–9) the accession of a ruler is mentioned with the words: “The beginning of the rule (lit. “throne”) of RN, the *waklum*, our lord,” a collective recognition of the status of the ruler.

The title *waklum*, “overseer,” still found in Middle Assyrian times, is used by the ruler in communications with his subjects, especially in letters, both the “official” ones mentioned above and private letters that deal, e.g., with his participation in trade. It may denote his position as the main administrator of the City, who has authority and has to be obeyed.

This variety of titles and the limited evidence for the ruler’s activities make it difficult to evaluate the extent of his power. He seems to have operated within the framework of the City Assembly, and the importance of the City Hall explains the absence of references to his palace, his family (apart from the

mention of a number of princes), and his staff; we do not know where he lived. The ruler's economic power was essentially that of a rich citizen, who participated in the trade and apparently had better access to luxury items, such as iron and lapis lazuli, sold by the City Hall. The ruler had his own agents who traveled in Anatolia, but several letters to prominent traders (analyzed in Larsen 1976: 132–5), in which he asked them to make someone pay and to collect and send to Ashur the money earned, show the limitations of his power.

The City Assembly

The main governmental body of Ashur was “the City,” that is the City Assembly, which took all the important decisions; its administrative instrument and seat was the “City Hall.” We meet the City (Assembly) most often as a court-of-law, to which traders could appeal. In this capacity it convened in the so-called “Step Gate” (*mušlālum*), situated “behind Assur’s temple,” in a “sacred precinct” (*ḥamrum*), presumably the locale with the statues of the seven divine judges, where oaths were sworn (see Veenhof 2015). Several texts report on what happened “in the City, in the Assembly (*puḥrum*), during a court-case.” For other purposes the City may have convened in the City Hall (*bēt ālim*). We do not know the size of the assembly (texts never mention its members), but it probably comprised the more important citizens. Considering the specific nature of Ashur, “important” could refer to lineage, function, status, and wealth.

The assembly of the colony (*kārum*) in Kaniš knew a bicameral system, with “great men” as a kind of executive committee which, aided by a secretary, took care of the daily running of the colony. It also decided whether a case warranted convening the plenary (“great and small”) assembly. Fragments of “Statutes of the *kārum*” (Larsen 1976: 283–332) reveal a decision-making procedure by majority vote, for which purpose the assembly was first divided into three groups and if no unanimity was reached into seven. The City Assembly may have known similar procedures, but its “Statutes” are unknown and we have only one single reference in a damaged text to “the City (Assembly), great and small.” But several texts mention “the Elders” as a body that passes verdicts, and they may well have been equivalent to the “great men” of the *kārum*.

Nearly all references to the City Assembly concern lawsuits about conflicts between individual citizens, but some decisions concern commercial or economic policy (Veenhof 2003c: 89–98, Hertel 2013: ch. 4). Two of them aim at protecting and furthering the import of textiles into Anatolia by prohibiting trade in Anatolian fabrics and by obliging traders to spend more silver in Ashur on buying textiles. Another forbids the sale of gold (imported

from Anatolia) to other inhabitants (traders) of Mesopotamia on penalty of death. The official letter adds that the old rule, written on the stele (*naru'ā'um*), remains in force, which reveals the existence of legal regulations, written on stone, hence laws. They are not preserved, but a few more texts refer to them when decisions are said to be “in accordance with the words of the stele.” The references all concern commercial and financial matters, but the laws were not necessarily restricted to such issues. I assume that they were the result of deliberations in the City Assembly, which decided that certain decisions with a more general applicability would be fixed and published, a procedure rather different from what we know of the Babylonian law collections, which are presented as emanating from the king (Veenhof 1995a: 1732–43).

The City was vitally interested in what happened in the colonies, because Ashur's prosperity depended on the success of the trade. Many of Ashur's senior citizens were merchants or investors in the trade. At least two of the *līmum* eponyms had lived in and served *kārum* Kaniš, others had traveled there, and a few princes feature in commercial documents as well. The City kept in contact with the colonies by means of official letters that gave directives dealing with issues such as smuggling and taxes (see AKT 5: 79–90). The City was officially present in Anatolia via the “Envoys of the City,” who were in particular involved in diplomatic relations with the native Anatolian rulers, with whom the leaders of *kārum* Kaniš concluded treaties.

The City Hall

The City Hall, the main instrument and locale of the administration of the City (see Dercksen 2004a: Part 1), was directed by an official called *līmum*. He was presumably chosen from among the representatives of the main families by casting lots and for a year wielded considerable powers, which in other states would be vested in the palace. That he had to hand over his job prevented the accumulation of power in one hand and secured a fair and impartial conduct. The City Hall managed the finances of the City, collected the export tax and fines, extended credit, and as a kind of public warehouse also sold merchandise, including lapis lazuli and the expensive iron, on the sale of which it seems to have had a monopoly. It was also involved in the stocking and sale of barley, assayed precious metals, and had its own (official) weights. Its personnel (Dercksen 2004a: 62–74) included a scribe/secretary, a “*līmum* of the barley,” and agents called *bērum*, whom we meet when defaulting debtors of the City Hall were forced to pay, eventually even by sealing or selling their houses. It had storage facilities and an archive; in connection with a trader's lawsuit we read, “tablets with depositions by witnesses were submitted to the City Assembly and have entered the *Līmum* Office, where

they are available” (AKT 6 no. 75: 23–5). Dercksen (2004a: 77–81), who collected evidence for the relation between the City Hall and the “Treasury of Ashur,” tried to identify its site and structure and suggested that the remains of so-called the ‘Schotterhofbau’ are the most likely candidate. He envisages it as “a multi-storey complex built around one or more courtyards, with rooms to accommodate the staff ... and a number of storage rooms” (2004a: 6–13).

We also know its seal, with the image of what must be the god Assur, a bull’s head protruding from a multi-tiered mountain and inscribed with the words: “Of divine Assur, of the import tax, of the City Hall” (Figure 3.3b). The words “of the import tax” suggests that it was used for a specific purpose. There was also another seal, with the inscription “Of divine Assur, of the City Hall.” It was impressed, more than a thousand years later, on the tablets with the so-called vassal-treaties of king Esarhaddon. It again shows how closely the god (and temple of) Assur, the City Assembly and the City Hall were linked.

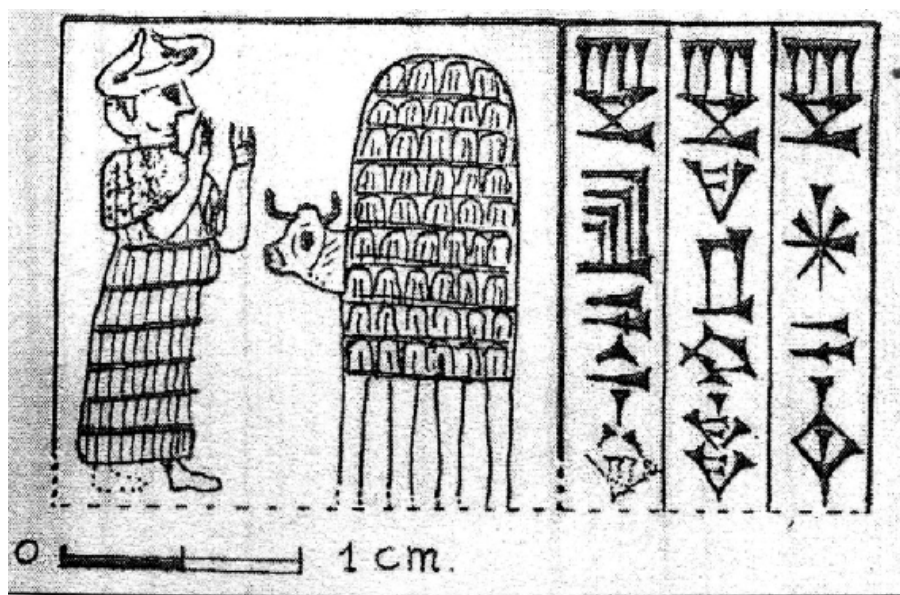


Figure 3.3b Seal of Assur, of the *nishātu*-tax, of the City Hall

(drawing by K. R. Veenhof). *Source*: Reproduced with permission of K. R. Veenhof.

The End of the Old Assyrian Period

Eponym List KEL G (Günbattı 2008b) shows that in Ashur the eponyms were duly appointed every year and that the Assyrian presence in Kaniš (where this list was found) continued perhaps until ca. 1710 BCE (see Barjamovic et al., 2012, Appendix 1), but we lack more detailed historical data. This makes it

impossible to know when and how the Assyrian colonial presence in Anatolia came to an end. While the destruction of the *kārum* around 1700 BCE was no doubt the result of political rivalry and war in Anatolia, we do not know what effect it had on Ashur and its trade. Those searching for potential reasons for a presumed decline of Ashur have suggested that the profitable trade broke down because the tin caravans did not longer arrive in the City or had trouble in crossing the Jezira, so that the route along the Euphrates was preferred. This is speculation and we have no evidence. Anyhow, Ashur did not come to an end and the standard recension of the King List, after listing seven “usurpers” who shortly occupied the throne after Išme-Dagan, continues with a series of new rulers, sons of the last usurper, Adasi.

The institutions of Ashur seem to have survived, and there may even have been a kind of restoration following the demise of Šamši-Adad’s dynasty (after the disappearance of Mut-Aškur, Išme-Dagan’s son?), as the Puzur-Sîn inscription mentioned above suggests. Anyhow, some innovations introduced by Šamši-Adad, such as the use of Babylonian in official inscriptions and the oath by the king in contracts, are no longer attested. The treaty with the king of Šeḥna is not concluded in the name of the ruler but that of the city of Ashur, and later rulers until the 14th century BCE still use the title “ensí of the divine Assur.” The few Late Old Assyrian house sale contracts we have, presumably from the 17th century BCE (Veenhof 2011: § 5), use the Old Assyrian dialect, legal formulary, and calendar, and do not contain an oath by the ruler. The “City Hall” continues to function and is still attested in the Middle Assyrian Period. Some essential features of the civic structure and culture of Old Assyrian Ashur remained in place.

Abbreviations

AKL

The Assyrian Kinglist, edition A. K. Grayson in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 7 (1981), 101–16.

AKT 5

K. R. Veenhof, *The Archive of Kuliya, son of Ali-abum*, Kültepe Tabletleri V (TTKY VI/33c), Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu 2010.

AKT 6

M. T. Larsen, *The Archive of the Šalim-Aššur Family*, vols. 1–3, Kültepe Tabletleri VI-a-c (TTKY VI/33d–a-c), Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu 2010–2014.

ARM

Archives royales de Mari, Paris 1950ff.

EL

G. Eisser and J. Lewy, *Die altassyrischen Rechtsurkunden vom Kültepe*, Teil 1- 2 (*MVAeG* 33), Teil 3-4 (*MVAeG* 35/3), Leipzig 1930–35. Quoted

by text number.

KEL

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MARI

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Further Reading

An introduction to the Old Assyrian period, with an overview of previous and current research and chapters on sources, chronology, and history, is Veenhof 2008a. Michel 2003 provides a full bibliography, periodically updated in *Archiv für Orientforschung*, with information on where the texts are published (the last update is in volume 53, 525–59). Ashur's history, first analyzed in Larsen 1976: 27–84, is not usually treated separately, but new text finds prompted Veenhof 2003a and Barjamovic et al. 2012 to restudy the chronology and history. For the wider historical context, Charpin 2004a should be consulted. RIMA 1 contains the inscriptions of Ashur's rulers (on which Galter 1998 offers comments). Letters dealing with political issues

involving Assyrian and Anatolian authorities are found in Michel 2001: chs. 1–2; see also Hecker 2007 and Günbattu 2014. A short sketch of *kārum* Kaniš is Veenhof 1995b. Özgüç, T. 2003 offers a rich presentation of the discoveries there, while Özgüç, N. 2006 presents a large collection of seal impressions. The catalogue of the exposition on Kaniš (Kulakoğlu and Kangal 2011) offers many illustrations and a large variety of articles on all aspects of the discoveries. Hertel 2014 offers an up-to-date overview of the houses excavated in Kaniš and their archives; studies of individual archives are found in *KIM* 1 and in *Altorientalische Forschungen* 35 (2008). Larsen 2002 provides an excellent edition of the texts from one (reconstructed) archive, with an accessible introduction. On trade, see Dercksen 2014. A still valid analysis of the administrative structures of Ashur and its colonies is Larsen 1976, supplemented by Dercksen 2004 and the short sketch provided in Veenhof 2003b: 434–41. An overview of Old Assyrian law and legal institutions is given in Veenhof 2003b; Hertel 2013 now presents and interprets the rich evidence for Old Assyrian legal practices and judicial procedures and analyses the great variety of pertinent records. The caravan system was reconstructed by Larsen 1967, and the caravan routes in Northern Mesopotamia by Nashef 1987 and Veenhof 2008b. The Anatolian copper trade is studied in Dercksen 1996, while textiles are treated in Michel and Veenhof 2010. Data on the cities, rulers, and Assyrian settlements in Anatolia are presented in Veenhof 2008a: ch. IV, and now, more fully, with a reconstruction of the caravan roads and maps, in Barjamovic 2011. The treaties with the Anatolian rulers were analyzed in Veenhof 2008a: ch. V and from a comparative point of view in Veenhof 2013. For an analysis of Ashur’s trade as part of a larger commercial network, see Larsen 1987. The role of Ashur as a trading city is the subject of Veenhof 2010. The most up-to-date introduction to the world of Ashur and its trading colonies is Larsen’s fine new book *Ancient Kanesh* (2015), which covers history, culture, and society.

Notes

- 1 The reversed order reflects a genealogy as mentioned in a royal inscription, “son of B, son of C, etc.,” which reveals the secondary nature of this insertion in the list (see Kraus 1965).
- 2 The treaty with Kaniš (Günbattu 2004: 253, line 82) mentions that an Anatolian ruler might “realize the *addurārum* of slave-girls [and slaves],” and some debt-notes mention the “washing off of debts” by an Anatolian ruler (Veenhof 2008a: 126–7).
- 3 A later Old Babylonian tale about the so-called “great rebellion” against Naram-Sin of Akkad mentions the kings of Ḫaḫḫum and Kaniš among his

enemies (Westenholz 1997: 250–1).

4 Figure 17 on p. 331 offers Miglus’s reconstruction of the temple layout.

5 In texts produced by the administration of the kingdom of Šamši-Adad, “the city” refers to Ashur as well (Ziegler 2002: 213–17).

CHAPTER 4

Economy, Society, and Daily Life in the Old Assyrian Period

Cécile Michel

Introduction

At the beginning of the second millennium BCE, Assyrians originating from Ashur settled in Kaniš and other Anatolian towns. They lived in the lower town of Kaniš with the local population. Almost no tablets from this period have been found in Ashur, whereas the commercial quarter of Kaniš has produced some 22,500 cuneiform tablets, dated predominantly to the level II period (ca. 1945–1835 BCE). Only 2 percent of the documentation dates to the later level Ib period (ca. 1832–1700 BCE).

The private archives of the Assyrian merchants, found in their houses in Kaniš's lower town, mainly concern the long distance trade they initiated, but also document the everyday life of their community in Anatolia, and, very indirectly, in Ashur. Because no archival texts were found in Ashur itself, we have only very few samples of their marriage contracts or of their last wills, which must have been kept in their houses in the mother city. There is, however, some information in the letters residents of Ashur sent to Kaniš about their religious beliefs, the organization of their households, and their daily occupations. These data may be compared with what we know about the Assyrians living in Kaniš, who left numerous archival texts.

The 22,500 Kaniš texts belong to two or three generations of Assyrian merchants and include letters, legal texts, and private notices (Hertel 2013; Michel 2003; Michel 2008e; Veenhof 2003a; Veenhof 2013). Letters offer data about domestic affairs, while legal texts sometimes deal with family law. The archives also cast light on the Anatolian society of Kaniš, which is, however, not taken into account in this chapter (Dercksen 2004b; Kryszat 2008a, 2008b; Michel 2011a, 2011b, 2014a, 2014b; Veenhof 2008: 147–246).

A major part of Ashur's population seems to have been involved in the international trade in tin and textiles or in the local Anatolian copper and wool trade. The family formed the heart of Old Assyrian society. Letters give an idea of the activities of the various family members, including merchant wives, who were often alone in Ashur, managing their households and raising their children. In the family enterprises, almost everyone worked to boost their personal profits (Larsen 2007). Devoting most of their time to the trade,

in which even priests and consecrated women were involved, the Assyrians depended on markets and shops to buy their food. Even though texts are usually silent about daily life, it is possible to describe some aspects of Assyrian society and the daily occupations of its members.

Ashur and Kaniš

The Old Assyrian city of Ashur occupied an area of about 55 hectares and probably housed between 7,000 and 10,000 inhabitants. But Assyrians were very mobile, often traveling to Anatolia (see [Figure 4.1](#)) and even staying there for extended periods of time. Archives unearthed in Kaniš's lower town indicate the presence of large numbers of Assyrians during the 19th and 18th centuries BCE. The city of Kaniš comprised between 170 and 230 hectares and was inhabited by some 25,000 or 30,000 people. Some 3,000 to 3,500 of them, their majority from Ashur, were living in the lower town commercial district, of which ca. 9 hectares have been unearthed so far (Barjamovic 2014; Hertel 2014).

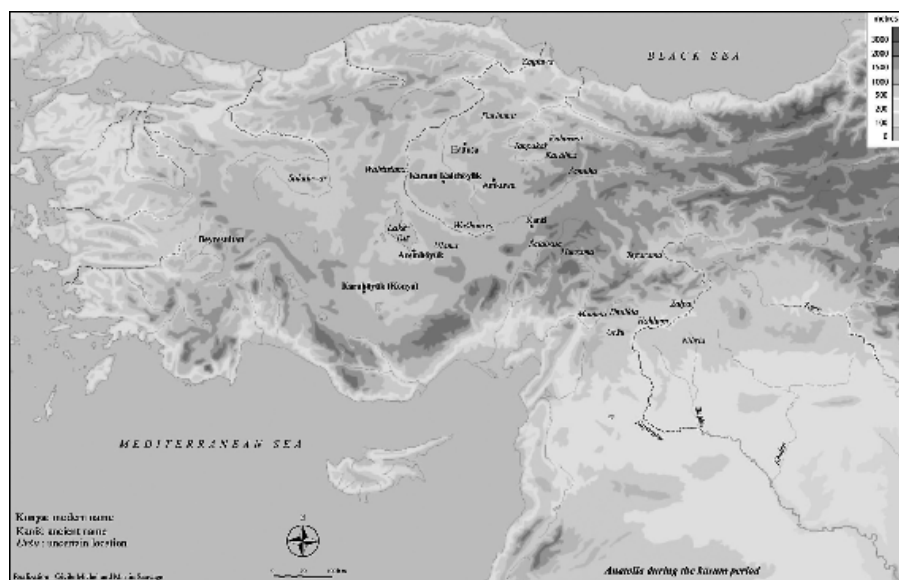


Figure 4.1 Anatolia during the Old Assyrian period.

Source: Reproduced with permission of Cécile Michel and Martin Sauvage.

Because Ashur was a trading center at the junction of important roads, many foreign merchants visited the city. Elamites exchanged tin for gold there. Babylonians from southern Mesopotamia sold their textiles in Ashur. People from upper Mesopotamia probably traveled to Ashur as well. Both in the city and abroad, Assyrian merchants interacted with foreigners on a regular basis.

They identified them by means of their ethnicity and the languages they spoke, as described in a verdict: “Assyrians can sell gold among each other but, in accordance with the words of the stele, no Assyrian whosoever shall give gold to an Akkadian, Amorite, or Subaraean” (Michel 2001: no. 2; Veenhof 1995a: 1731). “Akkadian” was the name given to the Babylonian population; the “Amorites” lived along the Euphrates River west of the upper Jezira; and “Subareans” were the Hurrians who settled north of Ashur along the Tigris River.

In Anatolia, beyond the Euphrates River, the Assyrians referred to the local people with the word *nuā’um*, which encompassed all of the Anatolians of Kaniš, as opposed to the Assyrians, who were called *tamkārūm* (“merchant,” see Edzard 1989). The personal names of the local population of Kaniš show that there were different ethnic groups: Hattians, Luwians, Hittites, and Hurrians (Garelli 1963: 127–68; Goedegebuure 2008; Wilhelm 2008). There were also merchants from Upper Syria who regularly visited Kaniš, from Ebla, for example. All of these people traded with each other and had no real communication problems. After one or two generations, Assyrian merchants had developed links with the local society that went beyond strictly commercial transactions (Dercksen 2002, 2007a; Michel 2010a, 2011a, 2014b; Ulshöfer 2000; Veenhof 1982a).

Old Assyrian society was divided into two main groups: the free citizens, who were called “men” (*awīlum*) or “sons of Ashur” (DUMU *Aššur*), and “slaves” (*wardum*, *amtum*). There was no specific distinction between the Assyrian citizens, but according to their rank, age, and wealth, they were considered either as “big” (GAL, *rabi*) or “small” (TUR, *šaher*) members of the assemblies of Ashur and Kaniš (Hecker 2003). Legally, there was also no distinction between women and men, who had more or less the same rights (Michel, forthcoming; Veenhof 2003b).

The great majority of Ashur’s inhabitants mentioned in the Old Assyrian archives from Kaniš participated in the long distance trade: the king and his family, the high dignitaries, the eponyms and other officials, priests and temples, etc. (Michel 2015b). Some merchants built large fortunes, which also benefited the city-state – Ashur’s City Hall raised taxes on caravans leaving or arriving in the city.

The king and the priests entrusted goods to a few important dealers in order to earn profits from the sale of their tin and textiles in Anatolia (Larsen 1976: 129–246; Michel 2015a). The eponyms, chosen from the important families of Ashur, were among the main traders in Ashur – some of them were active in Anatolia before or after their years of tenure (Dercksen 2004b; Kryszat 2004; Michel 1991; Veenhof 2003). Many occupations were linked to trade and caravan enterprises: bankers, bakers, traders, agents, employees (*šuhārūm*),

porters, guides or escorts, donkey drivers (*sāridum*), who were paid with salaries, and harnessers (*kašṣārum*), who were paid with operating capital; these latter two groups are well documented in hiring contracts (Larsen 1967; Michel 2001: 171–233; Veenhof 1994b).

In Kaniš, during the level II period, Assyrians were living in the lower town together with Anatolians, who participated in commercial activities as well. Initially, Anatolians were often indebted to the Assyrians. Later, through their implication in the trade and via mixed marriages, some Anatolians became increasingly wealthy and possessed some of the largest houses in the lower town (Michel 2011b). During the subsequent level Ib phase, commercial treaties distinguished the Assyrians who were involved in the caravan trade with Ashur (*ālikū ša ḥarrān ālim*) from those who were living in the lower town (*wašbūtum*). The first group profited from the international trade and visited Ashur regularly, while the second group devoted all of its time to the intra-Anatolian trade and, subsequently, lost contact with Ashur. They were less wealthy, often even indebted to Anatolians and, as a consequence, specific clauses were created to protect them and their houses in the *kārum*, the “merchant’s harbor” (Barjamovic, Hertel, and Larsen 2012; Günbatt 2004; Michel 2011a, 2011b, 2014a; Veenhof 2008: 147–82).

Slaves

In Ashur and Kaniš, the possession of several slaves was considered a sign of wealth, like the possession of a house (Veenhof 2011b). Slaves appear in sale contracts, last wills, and divisions of inheritance; they could be referred to collectively as *subrum* (Michel 2008b; Veenhof 2008: 110–11). Male slaves (*wardum*) and female slaves (*amtum*, which can also be translated as “second wife”) cost an average of 30 and 20 shekels of silver, respectively. Anatolian slaves were usually less expensive (Kienast 1984: 28). Slave sale contracts served as title deeds. Wealthy merchants could afford and support an entire domestic staff. Women possessed their own slaves, whom they would acquire through their dowry or by purchase. Among the slaves they inherited, men could receive female slaves with whom they had sexual relations (EL 287). Some slaves belonged to institutions, such as the Ashur City Hall (Kt 93/k 76:32) and the Ashur palace (KTS 1 55b:3–4).

Female slaves had to clean the house, prepare the meals, and help raise the children. They even could procreate on behalf of their infertile owners (Michel 2006b). Some of the male slaves were employed in the long-distance trade, hired as caravan personnel. A slave could be sold in order to pay a debt: an Assyrian woman bought back a slave that had been sold by her daughter-in-law in order to pay the export tax her husband owed to the City Hall of Ashur (Michel 2001: no. 306). But a slave could also be seized by a creditor

or by the authorities as security for a debt: “The eponym troubles me and he keeps seizing my slave-girls as security” (Michel 2001: no. 315). There were many debt slaves, especially among the Anatolians, who could often not pay the high interest rates imposed by the Assyrians. But there were also Assyrian children in Ashur who were given as pledge (*erubbātum*) for their fathers’ debts, detained by the creditor, and sometimes sold to repay the debt after the deadline had expired (Michel 2003a; Veenhof 2001; and below “Housewives, children, and education”). From letters, we learn that Assyrians could be detained as hostages by the local authorities and released with a heavy ransom (Günbattı 2001; Michel and Garelli 1996; Michel 2008e, 2014a).

The Assyrian Family

The family formed the basic unit of Mesopotamian society and thus occupies an important place in the written documentation, especially in law codes. Since no written laws have been recovered in Ashur or Kaniš, Old Assyrian family law must be reconstructed on the basis of contracts, court decisions, and letters. The letters provide primarily data on women who were alone because their husbands were away, because they were widows, or because they were consecrated to a divinity. Married women living with their husbands in Ashur or Kaniš did not need to write, or wrote only very few letters to other members of their families (Michel 2009d, forthcoming).

Contrary to the widespread belief that in Mesopotamia’s patriarchal society women were permanently under the men’s control, in the Old Assyrian sources they appear to be equal to men in many areas: men and women were both allowed to initiate divorce proceedings and had to pay identical fines, boys and girls could both inherit property, men and women participated in trade, lent money, bought and sold houses and slaves, or made their last wills (Michel, forthcoming; Veenhof 1995a, 2008a).

The following discussion focuses on the Assyrian family but also considers Anatolians in case they had family ties with Assyrians (Michel 2008c).

Marriage, divorce, and widowhood

About forty Old Assyrian contracts, as well as a dozen legal texts, deal with marriage or divorce. These documents predominantly concern Assyrians, but also Anatolians, and reflect different traditions (Kienast 2015; Michel 2006b, forthcoming [chapter 1](#); Rems 1996; Veenhof 1997b). Some letters provide data about the marriage ceremony and the status of wives. They also allow prosopographic reconstructions, which help us understand the various family

situations.

Written marriage contracts may have been drafted only in particular cases, and they do not seem to be standardized. The agreement was made between the parents of the bride and the groom or his family. The marriage was planned so that it would take place when the girl reached adulthood:

Aḥu-waqar and Zupa seized us (as arbitrators) and Aḥu-waqar (said) to Zupa as follows: “My sister has grown up! Come here and marry my sister in Kaniš.” Zupa (answered) as follows: “Let her wait!” Then Aḥu-waqar (said): “In Kaniš, you had the verdict of the *kārum*. You are far away! How long should my sister keep waiting?” Then Zupa (said): “Go ahead and give your sister to a husband of your choice.”

(Kt i/k 120 published by Balkan 1986; Michel, forthcoming: no. 6)

Marriage contracts document men taking (*aḥāzum*) women as wives. Marriage gifts (Veenhof 1998: 190, n. 66) are rarely mentioned in the Old Assyrian contracts, but a few letters state that if no gifts were exchanged the betrothal could be broken off (Figure 4.2):

Pilaḥ-Ištar seized us (as arbitrators) against Amur-Ištar, and Pilaḥ-Ištar (said to him) as follows: “You gave your word to my father. Come and marry your wife!” Amur-Ištar (answered) as follows: “I indeed gave my word to your father, but as my in-laws you (pl.) did not give me a belt for my waist, nor did you invite my brothers. Time passed and I have grown old, so I have married another girl from Ashur. Thus, I will not marry your sister.”

(Kt 88/k 625 published by Sever 1992b: 670; Michel, forthcoming: no. 7)

Tablette Kt 88/k 625



Figure 4.2 The Old Assyrian letter Kt 88/k 625. Ankara, Anadolu Medeniyetleri Müzesi.

Source: Photo Cécile Michel, reproduced with the permission of the archaeological mission of Kültepe.

The dowry given to the bride when she left her father's house belonged to her and was later inherited by her children. During the marriage ceremony, the groom gave the bride-price (*šimūm*) to the parents of the bride; a banquet took place and the bride was covered with a veil. But this symbolic act did not mean that married women had to wear a veil. After the ceremony, the woman left her family house for the house of her husband, who had to provide her with food and garments on a regular basis.

As a rule, marriage was monogamous. Some marriage contracts state explicitly that the groom promised not to take another wife. If after two or three years of marriage the wife had not given birth to any children, the husband was allowed to buy a slave (who could also be chosen by the wife) in order to produce heirs. This woman, however, remained a slave and never gained the status of second wife (Michel 2006b).

The particular situation of the Assyrian merchant, who was always far away from his homeland and settled in Anatolia for long periods of time, allowed him to take a second wife there:

Puzur-Ištar married as an *amtum*-wife Ištar-lamassi, daughter of Aššur-nada, and he can take her along with him to Buruṣḫattum or to Ḫattum, wherever his journeys will (lead) him, but he must bring her back with him to Kaniš. If he divorces her, he shall pay 5 minas of silver. If it is she who divorces him, she shall pay him 5 minas of silver. Also he shall not marry another (wife) apart from his *aššatum*-wife in the city of Ashur.

(Prag I 490; Michel 2006b; forthcoming no. 23)

Ḫattum was the name of the area located inside the Kızıl Irmak bend, and Buruṣḫattum represented the most western Assyrian trading post. As stated in this contract, the second marriage had to respect two rules: the merchant could not marry two women with the same status – one had to be the *aššatum* (“main wife”) and the other the *amtum* (“second wife”) – and he could not have two wives in the same area – one had to live in Ashur, the other in Anatolia. The main wife could be either Assyrian or Anatolian and she could live in either Ashur or Anatolia. So while the merchant was legally bigamous, he was not bigamous in practice since he never lived with both of his wives at the same time (Kienast 2008; Michel 2006b). Even if he travelled on a regular basis in Anatolia, he was not allowed to take a third wife in another trading post, but had to take the wife he married in Kaniš with him during all his travels, especially if she was Assyrian (Michel 2008c). The husband had to ensure that each of his spouses had a house to live in, as well as food and wood for their household. One can thus easily imagine that only wealthy merchants could financially support two wives and households at the same time.

From the letters, it seems that both wives had the same rights concerning their

husband, but it may have been that the children of the second wife had fewer rights regarding the inheritance of their father than those of the first wife.

This special situation left married women to manage their households alone for extended periods of time. The Assyrian wife was in Ashur during her husband's Anatolian career, raising her children, while the Anatolian wife could live with her husband as long as he was staying in Asia Minor but was left alone when her husband retired and went back to Ashur (Michel, forthcoming: [chapter 1](#)).

Some marriage contracts deal with the case of a possible divorce. Husband and wife could both initiate a divorce, and the fines, often high (up to 5 minas of silver, ca. 2.5 kilograms), were the same for both parties. These gender-neutral regulations, very different from the situation in Babylonia, may have been influenced by the Anatolian tradition, in which both spouses had equal rights and shared common property (Michel 2008c). A large majority of divorces were consensual and resulted from private agreements made in the presence of witnesses. If the wife behaved badly, the husband was allowed to repudiate her without paying any compensation: he could strip her of her possessions and chase her away. On the other hand, if a man developed a loathing for his wife, he could send her back to her father's home but had to pay her compensation (Donbaz 2003; Kt 94/k 141; Michel, forthcoming no. 31). Divorced men and women could remarry as they wished:

Šakriušwe (was) the wife of Aššur-taklaku; husband and wife divorced. One will not raise claim against another with respect to anything. They will not raise claim regarding her bride price. Šakriušwe will go to (the husband) of her choice, either an Anatolian or an Assyrian, and Aššur-taklaku will marry the wife of his choice.

(Kt n/k 1414; Sever 1992b: 668; Michel, forthcoming no. 38)

Many examples deal with the divorce of an Assyrian from his Anatolian wife. This happened regularly when the Assyrian merchant decided to go back to Ashur and remained there. He thus had to first make a divorce agreement with his local wife and to make a decision about their children. The husband had to pay divorce money and he could decide to take his children with him, or to take only the boys and older girls after having paid for their upbringing and their food (Michel 2008c).

When a father died, his children inherited his goods and had to take care of their mother; if there was no child, the widow could remarry and keep her dowry. When a mother died, her children shared her dowry; if there was no descendant, the dowry was given back to the family of the deceased wife (Veenhof 2008a). The widow could also inherit from her husband if he had written a last will which gave her rights over the house and the capital:

Agua drew up his will as follows: The house in Ashur is the one of my

wife. Concerning the silver, she will share it with my children. Concerning the silver, her inheritance share, she is (like) father and mother. House and silver, her inheritance, as well as everything that she (already) possesses, (will be later) the property of Šu-Belum.

(Albayrak 2000; Michel 2000b, forthcoming no. 54)

But after her death, everything a wife inherited from her husband belonged to their eldest son, who was in charge of his parents' funerals and the worship of his ancestors. A widow was free to remarry either an Assyrian or an Anatolian: there are several examples of Assyrian widows married to Anatolians (Kryszat 2007a; Veenhof 2008a; Michel, forthcoming).

Housewives, children, and education

In Ashur, many women lived alone, waiting for their husbands to return. The youngest wives had to live with their in-laws, and cohabitation was not always successful (Michel 2001: no. 320, forthcoming no. 146). Other wives had to not only raise their children alone and carry out the daily work of women, but also, as the heads of their households, provide clothing and food to children and servants, repair the house, and so forth (Michel, forthcoming: [chapter 3](#)). To deal with such matters, they sent many letters to their husbands in Anatolia.

We know very little about the age of puberty, the age of marriage, or the number of children per woman, but the reconstruction of the genealogies of some well-known Assyrian families gives us at least a vague idea of the average number of children who became adults. Taking into account that girls are not always mentioned (Michel 2015c), there might have been an average of three to six children per woman who reached adulthood. The most prosperous couples had more children than others: they earned enough to raise the children and to leave them property after their death. The children had to care for their aging parents, to pay for their burials, and to provide their spirits and dead bodies with what they needed (Michel 2008f; Veenhof 1998, 2008a, 2014a). In poor families, children could be pledged, or even sold, for a debt (see the sub-section on slaves).

Maternity is usually not documented in private archives but was the subject of medical and magic texts. Five of the ten Old Assyrian incantations found in Kaniš were intended to help a woman in labor, to cure a newborn baby of jaundice, and to chase away the evil demoness Lamaštu, who attacked pregnant women and babies (Barjamovic 2015; Kouwenberg and Fincke 2013; Michel 1997e, 2004b; von Soden 1956). One text identifies a woman not by her name but by her profession as a midwife (*šabsūtum*, TC 3 219:9).

In the letters they wrote to their husbands, women revealed their anxieties about raising and educating their children (*šerrum*, *šurum*). The merchants abroad wrote to their wives in order to get news of their progeny (Michel 1997d, forthcoming; Veenhof 2008: 106).

Children were raised in a feminine environment, since the eldest sons followed their fathers abroad. Some wealthy families could hire a wet nurse (*mušēniqum*), who received a salary. When a mother died, sometimes in childbirth, her children were entrusted to family members, such as uncles or grandparents. When Aššur-nada settled in Anatolia, he already had a son and daughters in Ashur, who were raised by their paternal grandfather, Aššur-idi, because their mother had died quite young. Even though Aššur-idi received a pension (*tarbītum*) from his son, he complained that, despite all the time and money he was dedicating to his grandchildren, they did not respect him:

I have raised your son, but he said to me: “You are not my father.” He got up and left. Also I have raised your daughters, but they said: “You are not our father.” Three days later, they got up and left to go to you, so let me know what you think.

(Larsen 2002: no. 22; Michel 2001: no. 254)

In leaving their grandfather, the children used the classical formulas for breaking an adoption contract: they refused their grandfather’s tutelage. There are very few examples of adoptions because such contracts were kept in family archives in Ashur. The adopted child, who could have been a slave, inherited from his adoptive father.

The father had legal authority over his children and the right to decide whether to marry off or consecrate his daughters. The younger children were raised by their mother, who was also in charge of their moral and religious education. Boys could go to a master in order to learn how to read and write (Michel 2008a). When they became teenagers, they followed their fathers to Anatolia and learned the basics of the trade. Girls stayed with their mother, helped her with her daily tasks, and learned how to spin and weave. They contributed to the domestic production of textiles (Michel 2006d).

Consecrated women

In several Old Assyrian families, parents consecrated their eldest daughter to a god, presumably Assur. It was a religious act of gratitude to the god for their flourishing trade and a way to confirm their social position. In fact, some of the consecrated girls belonged to the richest families of Ashur. Consecrated women (*gubabtum*, NIN.DINGIR) lived independently in Ashur, possibly near the temple. Their religious pursuits are almost never documented in the tablets found in Kaniš (Dercksen 2015, 53–4), but we have letters and legal

texts illustrating their status and economic activities (Michel 2009c). A girl was consecrated before being old enough to get married, as we learn from a letter sent by an Assyrian woman to her husband: “(Our) young (daughter) has grown up very much; come and put her under the protection of the god Assur, and seize the foot of your god” (Michel 2001: no. 307, forthcoming no. 166). The woman succeeded in persuading her husband, since we learn that her daughter did in fact become a *gubabtum*. Once consecrated to the god, a woman could not get married but was economically independent. She had her own capital with which she participated in the trading activities of her family, investing in the long-distance trade and lending money. She was the owner of the house in which she lived and, like her brothers, could inherit from her father. She was even free to travel and settle in a foreign land, where she could own a house (Michel 2009c). The letters sent by consecrated women to Anatolia show that they were involved in many important family decisions. One of them gave advice to her sister, who was traveling abroad and leaving husband and child in Ashur; she tried to save her sister’s marriage, which was in danger (Veenhof 2007a). Other categories of consecrated women, such as the *qadištum*, could marry, but were not allowed to have children (Michel 2006b, 2009c, forthcoming: [chapter 5](#)).

Succession

Since there was no general rule concerning inheritance, Assyrians usually wrote last wills. In these documents, they took care to protect the interests of their wives and daughters. In the case of a sudden death, the lack of a written testament was the source of many problems. According to the very few testaments recovered (most of them were kept in Ashur), and according to the verdicts of trials dealing with inheritance, the Assyrian tradition used to give the eldest son a more important share than the share reserved for other children (Michel 1997d, forthcoming: [chapter 2](#); Veenhof 2011a). His inheritance share often included the main house, where he had to take care of his mother if she was still alive. Another possibility was that the house was given to the widow in usufruct and was handed over to the eldest son at a later time.

Sons had to pay the debts of their fathers before sharing his goods with their consecrated sisters. The other daughters usually received their share in the form of a dowry. If a father died before marrying off his daughters, their brothers had to arrange and finance their marriages with their inheritance shares. Unlike sons, daughters were not responsible for their fathers’ debts (Michel 2003a, forthcoming).

Consecrated women were always mentioned in last wills and could be the first among the children to inherit (Hecker 2004a; 2004b; Michel 2009c). They

received silver, loan contracts, servants, and sometimes an annual allocation: “My sons will pay my backers and of the silver left belonging to me, (my daughter) Ab-šalim will first take 1/3 mina of gold, 1 mina of silver, and a maid” (Kt o/k 196c; Albayrak 2000; Michel 2000b; forthcoming no. 54).

After the death of a mother, her children normally inherited her dowry and goods, but some widows preferred to write their last wills in order to divide their property as they wished. Lamassatum, the wife of Elamma, left silver cups and toggle pins, several silver loan contracts, textiles, slaves, and slave-girls. All of her belongings were entrusted to her representatives and sent to Ashur where “my daughter, the consecrated girl, and my sons will act in accordance with the testamentary dispositions applying to them” (Kt 91/k 421; Veenhof 2011a). A dozen documents concern the burial and succession of Ištar-lamassi, first the widow of the Assyrian Kunilum, with whom she had three children, and then the widow of the Anatolian Lulu. She wrote her last will in order to split her property between her two sons and her daughter, who even received a seal, which was usually reserved for the eldest son:

(Of) the 57 shekels of silver that are available, Ilia will receive 37 shekels, Ilabrat-bani will receive 20 shekels, (and) they will send to my daughter, the *gubabtum*, 2 ¼ shekels of gold and 7 ½ shekels of silver and a seal.

(Kt 91/k 453; Veenhof 2008a: 103, 106).

After both brothers died soon after their mother’s death, a great deal of money was spent for the burial of Ištar-lamassi’s second husband and for her two sons’ burials. The daughter, Šimat-Ištar, was the only child left and inherited the rest of the fortune.

Elderly people and ancestors

Care of the elderly was the responsibility of the family, primarily of the sons, which may explain why some merchants went back to Ashur to take care of their aging parents and to bury them (Veenhof 1998, 2014). Children inherited from their father and had to take care of their mother; sometimes, she could stay in the family house even if the building had to be sold (Michel, forthcoming no. 51-52). In an adoption contract dated to the later period, Level Ib, the parents adopted an adult slave: he could inherit against the promise to respect his adoptive parents, to take care of them, and to later bury them and perform the cult of the dead (Veenhof 1982c).

When a member of the family died, the family organized and paid for the funeral. The body was buried in a grave (*quburum*) during a ceremony (*bikītum*), and there was a period of mourning (Michel 2008f; Veenhof 2008a). It was believed that after their death, ancestors lived on as spirits (*eṭemmu*). They dwelled in the Underworld with all the other ancestors of the

family and could appear to their descendants as ghosts in their dreams. Altogether, the living members of the family honored the ancestors and maintained relationships with them by means of prayers and offerings. To make this obligation easier to fulfill, deceased family members were buried under the floor of the house. Because of this tradition, it was very difficult for descendants to sell the family house (Michel 2008f; 2009b).

In Kaniš's lower town, the cist graves that were dug under the houses of level Ib disturbed the rooms from level II. Some of the graves contained ceramics, various objects, and jewels (Emre 2008; Üstündağ 2014). Some graves of wealthy Old Assyrian merchants were also excavated in Ashur. They contained very valuable funerary offerings: bronze vessels and weapons, jewelry made of gold and precious stones, cylinder seals, as well as figurines and golden leaves that were used in the afterlife rituals (Haller 1954; Hockmann 2010).

The eldest son, who inherited the family house, was in charge of the rituals performed for the deceased family members. But if he was in Anatolia for trade purposes, and his sisters or wife lived in his house in Ashur, a problem arose: because they could not perform the cult of the dead, they received warnings from the spirits and were exposed to the anger of the ghosts, who were furious that their heirs had abandoned them. In a letter sent to their brother and uncle, two women complained that they were being treated poorly by demons and spirits of the dead: "Here Belatum is ill because of the silver of the *ikribū*-votive offerings. We are mistreated by demons and spirits of the dead" (Michel 2001: no. 323). The women were eager to see their husbands and brothers retire and come back to Ashur (Michel 2008f, forthcoming; [chapter 5](#)).

Economy and Daily Life

The written documentation from the Old Assyrian period focuses on the Assyrian trade between Ashur and Kaniš. Merchants from Ashur brought tin, which had been imported from the east, and textiles, locally produced or acquired from Babylonians, on a six-week journey to Kaniš, and sold them there. On the way back, they brought gold and silver to Ashur.

References to daily life are usually rare in the documents. Nevertheless, the many private letters from Kaniš do provide some data about topics such as textile production, several other crafts and occupations, and the markets and shops where people could buy the food that they needed daily. Some letters are quite emotive (Larsen 2001). Assyrian-owned houses and furniture are mentioned as well and have been found in the excavations that have been undertaken in Kaniš's lower town. Several documents allude to religious

practices and Assyrian gods.

Family enterprises and other trade networks

As mentioned above, the long-distance trade was to a large extent a family affair. Each family member had specific tasks to perform within the trade system. The family enterprises, based in Ashur, had representatives in several Anatolian trading posts. Family ties formed the basis of many professional relationships (Dercksen 1996: 90–161; Ichisar 1981; Larsen 1982a, 2002, 2010; Michel 1991, 2005).

That business relationships were derived from family affiliation is also reflected in the vocabulary: the “house,” *bētum*, could refer to the enterprise, the “father,” *abum*, was the boss, the “brother,” *aḥum*, was a partner, and younger members of the family, *ṣūḥārū*, were employees (Hertel 2015; Veenhof 2014a). Often, the father, who was at the head of the family enterprise, lived in Ashur and did not travel to Anatolia. He was the one who made important decisions on behalf of the family enterprise. He gathered capital to buy tin, textiles, and donkeys, and he organized the caravans and shared the profits earned; his eldest son, usually settled in Kaniš, managed the Anatolian branch of the family enterprise. He received the deliveries of merchandise that arrived from Ashur and organized its sale in Kaniš or entrusted it to agents responsible for its sale in other trading posts within the Anatolian plateau. The other sons helped with selling tin and textiles in Anatolia, transporting the goods between the main Anatolian localities, or traveling between Ashur and Kaniš with the caravans. Some of them represented the family enterprise in other Anatolian centers, where they settled more or less permanently (Michel 1991: 140–2, 2001: 359–418). Wives and daughters living in Ashur participated in the family trade by weaving high-quality textiles for long-distance trade. Often left alone in Ashur, they represented the interests of their male relatives and were also involved in some financial operations (Michel, forthcoming: [chapter 5](#)).

In Kaniš, after one or two generations, mixed marriages between Assyrians and Anatolians increased. These marriages joined Anatolians to Assyrian families, thus enlarging the network of professional relationships (Michel 2010a; Veenhof 1982a). After the death of the father (and boss) in Ashur, an uncle or the eldest son could take over the management of the family enterprise. But the uncle or son in question could also decide to start his own enterprise with a new organization (Larsen 2007). The Old Assyrian archives, which predominantly document two generations of families from the point of view of the family members settled in Kaniš, reveal that brothers sometimes had few business contacts; this is the case with the sons of Issu-arik (whose archives were excavated in 1994; Larsen 2010), and with Elamma and Ali-

aḫum, the sons of Iddin-Suen, whose archives were unearthed in 1991 and 1993 (studied by K. R. Veenhof and C. Michel).

An Assyrian's social position and reputation was determined by the wealth of his family enterprise, even though the capital was clearly owned individually (Larsen 2007). This also applies to married couples, with husband and wife managing their own finances (Michel 2006d, forthcoming [chapter 4](#)). The extended family served as a network of professional relationships in which property and responsibility were strictly individualized; there was no common fund. This explains, for example, why there were loan contracts with interest between members of the same family.

Families could interact with other kinds of networks created to engage in long-distance trade: an example is the system of joint-stock partnerships in which several investors could put their capital together in order to finance commerce that was carried out by an agent for a dozen years or longer (Dercksen 1999; Larsen 1977, 2007; Michel 2001, 2005; Veenhof 1997a, 1999a). Junior members of the family could belong to a family enterprise headed by their fathers and, at the same time, to a joint-stock partnership under the authority of investors who had no family ties with them. The line between family ties and commercial networks is often hard to draw, which makes it difficult to understand what exactly was hidden behind the well-attested expression *bēt abini* “the house of our father” (Hertel 2015; Larsen 2007; Veenhof 2014a).

Loans

Loan contracts between Assyrians and Anatolians, or within the Assyrian community, were frequent. Some debt-notes resulted from the sale on credit of merchandise and had only a default interest (Veenhof 1999a; Michel 2013b). Some employees were paid with interest-free working capital (*be'ulātum*) instead of a salary.

Non-commercial loans with interest between individuals consisted of small quantities of silver or cereals. Silver could be borrowed with interest from the house of a *tamkārum*. For the Assyrians, the interest fixed by the *kārum* office amounted to 30 percent per year; it was even higher for the Anatolians. The creditor could ask for guaranties: a guarantor, the joint responsibility of debtors, or a surety (such as members of the family, the house, or other goods). If a guarantor had to borrow silver in order to pay the loan, the creditor could impose an interest on top of the established interest of the debtor. Loan contracts were for short periods of time, generally shorter than a year.

When a debt was repaid, the creditor gave the loan tablet back to the debtor

and the contract was cancelled by breaking the envelope or by giving the debtor a receipt (see [Figure 4.3](#)) (Dercksen 1999; Michel 1995, 2003a; Veenhof 2001, 2003b).



Figure 4.3 An Old Assyrian letter comprising a main tablet and a small second one preserved together in their sealed envelope. Kt 93/k 211, Ankara, Anadolu Medeniyetleri Müzesi.

Source: Photo Cécile Michel, reproduced with the permission of the archaeological mission of Kültepe.

Textile production and businesswomen

The long-distance trade was based in Ashur, where the families of the merchants were settled. Ashur was the transit city for the tin and textile trade, but many households also produced textiles locally. All of the women in the household weaved textiles, but not only to dress their family: most of the textiles they produced were exported to Anatolia (Michel 2006d, forthcoming: [chapter 4](#); Michel and Veenhof 2010; Veenhof 1972). Not always could they satisfy the demand for textiles:

You should not get angry because I did not send you the textiles about which you wrote. As our little girl has grown up, I had to make a pair of heavy textiles for the wagon. Moreover, I made (some) for the staff of the household and for the children; this is why I did not manage to send you

textiles.

(Michel 2001: no. 307; forthcoming: no. 166)

The total production by the women who belonged to the same household would amount to some twenty-five textiles a year: this was not enough for the thousands of textiles exported each year. Thus, the Assyrians also bought textiles from Babylonians. There is no reference to institutional textile production in Ashur.

Women bought the wool nearby, which came from sheep that grazed in Suḥum and were brought to Ashur to be plucked. *Šurbu'ūtum* wool, which came from animals that were bred in the Ḥamrin Mountains, was the best for weaving the *kutānum* textiles that were exported to the west (Dercksen 2004a: 16, n. 32; Michel 2014c; Michel and Veenhof 2010: 221). But more so than the quality of the wool, it was the technical skill of the Assyrian women that mattered. They were even able to copy various techniques used in other cities, and their products were valued by the men of the family, who frequented the Anatolian markets and knew very well the nature of the demand:

As for the thin textile you sent me, you must make such ones and send (them) to me with Aššur-idi, and I will send you ½ mina of silver (apiece). One must *strike* the one side of the textile, and not *pluck* it, its wrap should be close. Add, per piece, one pound of wool more than you used for the previous textile you sent me, but they must remain thin! Let them *strike* its second side only slightly. If it proves still to be hairy let one *pluck* it like a *kutānum*. As for the Abarnian textile you sent me, such a one you must not send me again. If you make (one), make (it) like the one I dressed myself in there. If you do not manage (to make) thin textiles, I hear that there are plenty for sale over there, buy (them) and send them to me. A finished textile that you make must be nine cubits long and eight cubits wide (4.5 × 4 meters)

(Michel 2001: n°318, forthcoming: no. 162; Michel and Veenhof 2010: 250–2; Wisti Lassen 2010: 274–6).

Once the textiles were finished and went through the cleaner, the women organized the textiles' transport to Anatolia, entrusting them to male members of their family who traveled regularly between Ashur and Kaniš or paying transporters who could add a few units to their loads. In exchange for the sale of their textiles, the women received gold and silver, sometimes in the form of jewelry, which they sold on behalf of their households or invested in commercial transactions and in loans with interest. The more textiles they sent, and the better their quality, the higher the price they received. The regular production of textiles ensured the women an income. Besides the management of their personal funds, women acted as representatives for their husbands and brothers. They acted as true businesswomen (Michel 2006d; forthcoming: [chapter 4](#)).

Craftsmen and other professionals

Aside from information on the women weaving at home, the Old Assyrian documents include very little data on craftsmen or other professions in Ashur, and occupational designations concerning Kaniš refer predominantly to Anatolians. However, it is possible to give a list of attested occupations, even if we know almost nothing about the social status of the individuals who held them (Michel 2015b).

Besides the many activities linked to the political, legal, and economic administration of the state (kings, eponyms, officials of the City Hall and of the *bēt kārim*, scribes, stewards, judges, attorneys, messengers, and different functionaries; see Dercksen 2004a), to religion (see below, “Religion”), or to the international trade, both in Ashur and Kaniš (merchants, agents, transporters, donkey drivers, harnessers, guides, escorts, and even smugglers), the texts cite few professions. Several Ashur eponyms are mentioned with their professions: Aššur-imitti the boatman, Puzur-Aššur the ghee trader (or: the one who supplies the palace with ghee), and Amaya, the one in charge of the weapons (or: an arms dealer) (Kryszat 2004; Veenhof 2003). Indirect references also appear, such as “the house of the carpenter” (Michel 2001: no. 345). It is likely that other specialized craftsmen, such as bleachers, rope makers, and leather-workers, were also active in Ashur (Dercksen 2004a: 255–85).

In Kaniš, apart from the numerous functionaries working for the local palace, there were various specialized Anatolian craftsmen: house builders, carpenters, leather-workers, textile cleaners, potters, gardeners, shepherds, oil traders, salt traders, female millers, and wet-nurses. In **H**attuš, there is a reference to a female tavern keeper (KBo 9 10:4). But we also find Assyrians who were not merchants. Among these are “interpreters” (*targumannum*), “metal workers” (*nappāhum*, Dercksen 1996: 71–6; Sturm 2001), a “tavern keeper” (*sābium*), a “confectioner” (*kakardinnum*), a “barber” (*gallābum*), who was sold as a slave, and a “weaver” (*ušparum*; Michel 2001: 561–77, 2015b; Veenhof 2008: 118).

Market and shops

Besides the warehouses in Ashur where one could buy tin and textiles, there were “markets” (*mahīrum*) or stalls and street shops for local products covering basic needs and, perhaps, wool to produce textiles (RIMA 1, 49:62–4). These would not necessarily have left archaeological traces, since they could have been in open-air places. In Ashur, women had to buy barley to

feed their households with the silver they earned from their textile production:

It is the right season; take good care to send me, in exchange for my textiles, silver from what you happen to have at hand, so that I can buy 10 measures of barley.

(Michel 2001: no. 344, forthcoming: no. 128)

The City Hall could sell barley and copper, as well as products that would be subsequently exported to Anatolia. A larger market might have existed near the city gate but it is not mentioned in the texts (Dercksen 2004a: 33–9).

In Kaniš, the “market” (*maḥīrum*), presumably located on the citadel, was partly covered and controlled by the “chief of the market” (*rabi maḥīrim*). It included shops or stalls where people could buy slaves, agricultural products, and animals from the surrounding villages, as well as different varieties of wheat and barley, wood, reeds, and cattle (Dercksen 2008a; Hecker 1997; Michel 2011a; Veenhof 2003c). The Assyrians who worked full time trading metals and textiles were totally dependent on these markets for products for their daily lives. Some of them, however, had Anatolian wives and were more fortunate since these women were also involved in agricultural tasks such as fieldwork and the breeding of oxen and pigs (Michel 2008c).

Metrology and means of payment

In their many transactions, the Assyrians used a decimal system to count discrete objects, for example, textiles and bread. Products that were usually measured in units, such as cereals, were sold in “sacks” (*naruqqum*, ca. 120 l.) and “jars” (*karpatum*, ca. 30 l.) of a standard capacity. Beer was measured in “jugs” (*kirrum*). Among the different metrological systems used by the merchants, the weight system dominated because of the nature of the traded goods, which were predominantly metals (Michel 2006a). Tin, gold, silver, and iron were measured according to the classical sexagesimal weight system in shekels, minas, and talents. In Anatolia, copper was weighed in hundreds of minas, in a system that ignored the talent, perhaps influenced by the local decimal system.

A tablet dated to the level Ib period gives a metrological correlation, indicating that 840 Anatolian minas equaled 760 Assyrian minas, which means that the Assyrian mina was 10 percent heavier than the Anatolian one (Kt u/k 3; Dercksen 1996: 87; Michel, in press).

The length system was occasionally used when measuring textiles in cubits (*ammatum*, ca. ½ meter), and the *šubtum* (perhaps equivalent to 36 m²) served to give the surface area of a building (Veenhof 2011b).

In Ashur, Assyrians probably paid gold for the tin they bought from the Elamites but paid silver to the Babylonians for the textiles they imported. They also used silver to buy houses, slaves, and large amounts of cereals, or to pay taxes to City Hall; loans were usually made in silver. It was exchanged in the form of rings or refined ingots broken in small pieces (*ṣarrupum*, Veenhof 2014b).

On the way to Anatolia, tin was used for current expenses, such as to pay the inns where caravans stopped and cover the toll when crossing borders. Tin circulated in the form of rings and small ingots (Dercksen 2005a; Veenhof 1972: 32–5). Silver and copper items were also used as small change.

In Anatolia, Assyrians were involved in the local trade in copper, a metal that, in the form of ingots, small pieces, or even old sickles, served to buy cheap goods such as food products (Dercksen 1996; Lehner 2014).

Meals

Letters written by women from Ashur mention the need to buy barley and to prepare beer bread for their husbands, but we know much more about the diet of Assyrians who were settled in Kaniš. Bread and beer represented the main food and drink products; water consumption was taken for granted and is thus never mentioned.

Cereals and products derived from them such as flour, porridge, and bread were the staple foods. Grains of wheat, barley, and spelt were crushed and ground to make flour, which was used to make two kinds of bread: bread made only with flour and water or sourdough bread. Sesame oil and animal fat, such as lard, were used for cooking but also for lighting or for washing. The diet also included vegetables, mainly leeks and onions, and fruits (nuts, grapes, and pomegranates). Herbs and spices, such as cumin, coriander, or mustard, were added to dishes, and people in Kaniš used salt from the Tuz Gölü both as a condiment and as a conservative. Honey, measured in jars, served as a preservative or as a sweetener (Dercksen 2008a, 2008b; Fairbairn 2014; Michel 1997a).

Assyrians also ate meat (sheep, oxen, and pork) as well as fish and shrimp. The animals were often killed at home, or cuts of meat were bought and grilled. For their many travels, merchants could buy meat dishes, such as stew (Atici 2014; Dercksen 2008a; Lion, Michel, and Noël 2000; Michel 1997a, 2006c, 2014d).

Assyrians primarily drank beer, but they also appreciated wine, which was made from Cappadocian grapes. Brewing beer was a typically domestic activity: prepared at home by the women, it was made through the maceration and fermentation of barley, with malt and beer bread as the main constituents.

In Ashur, malt was obtained from germinated barley grain while, in Anatolia, it was prepared with wheat grain. The beer bread was made of crushed barley. Each house had a stock of malt and beer bread ready to use for making beer. Beer and wine were served during private and public feasts, but some merchants had beer daily and would get drunk (Michel 2009a).

Meals were prepared by the women, who cooked in the metal vessels that they received as part of their dowry. In a letter sent to his fiancée, an Assyrian merchant mentions the duties of the wife, namely, serving her husband and cooking for him: “Please, the day you hear (the words of) my tablet there, turn to your father (so that he agrees), set out and come here with my servants. I am alone. There is no one who serves me nor to set the table for me” (Michel 1997a; forthcoming no. 3).

Houses and furniture

In Ashur and Kaniš, the Assyrian merchants bought, built, or extended their houses; sale contracts were used as title deeds (Kienast 1984) and redemption was possible for houses that had been sold as guarantees (Veenhof 1999b). The house was the building that accommodated people for the night but, more importantly, it represented the family that lived there: it was handed down from generation to generation and the family’s ancestors were buried under its floor. Houses were built with mud bricks; reeds and wooden beams were used for ceilings, roofs, stairs, and furniture. Houses had to be maintained regularly; the inhabitants had to change the bricks and beams and renew the plaster of the roof and the walls. A woman awaiting the return of her eldest son to Ashur prepared the work:

Concerning the house in which we live, since the house was in disrepair, I was worried and had mud bricks made during the spring and I have piled them up. As for the wooden beams you wrote about, send me as much silver as you can so that one may buy beams here.

(Michel 1997b, 2001: no. 320, forthcoming: no. 146; Veenhof 2011b)

The house was the domain par excellence of the woman, who wanted to possess a building as large and as nice as possible to show off the social success of her family. One woman, envying her neighbors, wrote to her husband: “Since you left, Šalim-aḫum built two times a house; when will we be able to do (the same)?” (Michel 2001: no. 306; forthcoming: no. 147). The Old Assyrian commercial quarter in Ashur has not yet been located, thus we do not know if, as in Kaniš, the houses there had an upper story. According to sale contracts, the average merchant’s house had a surface area of a hundred square meters and its price could vary from 5 to 15 minas of silver. Some houses are described as having a “main room” (*ekallum*; Michel 2001: no.

339, 1997b: 287). Because of the existence of a storage room containing archives and precious goods, it was important to guard the house at night and during the absence of its inhabitants.

In Kaniš, Assyrians lived in the lower town. They bought houses built according to the local style; their average being 70–90 square meters, with some reaching over 150 or even 200 square meters (Özgüç 2003: 77–114). The two-story houses comprised a kitchen with an oven in its center, storerooms, and a sealed room. Some houses were organized around an open court. Their inhabitants lived and slept upstairs (Figure 4.4). According to their last wills, Assyrian merchants left their houses in Kaniš to their eldest sons or to their Anatolian wives.

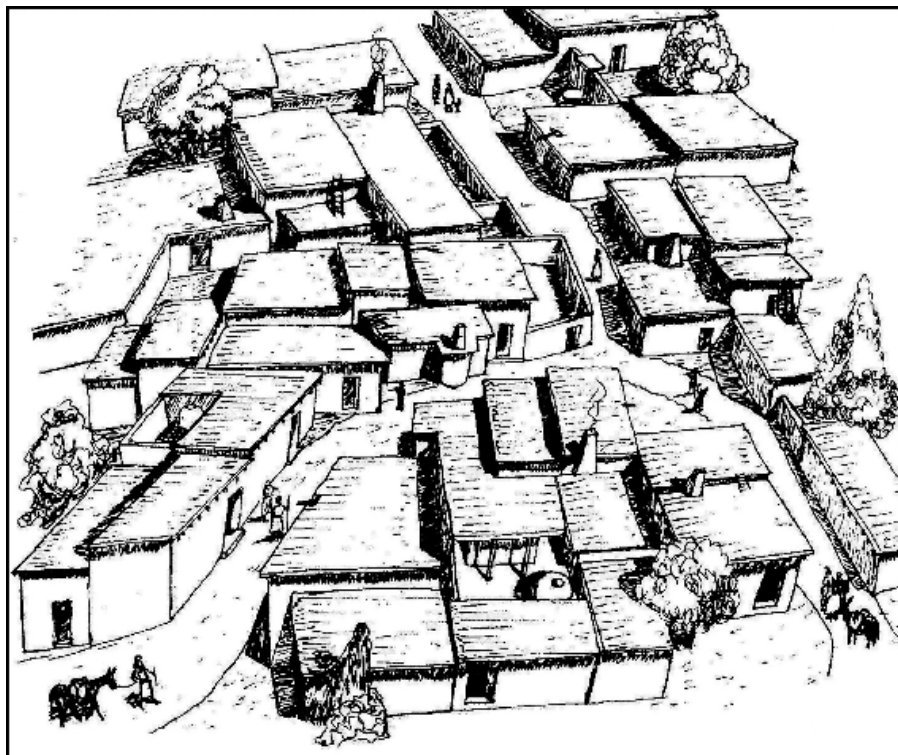


Figure 4.4 Private houses in the lower town level II, reconstruction.

Source: Özgüç 2003: 106, no. 60.

Inside houses in Kaniš, various domestic objects were excavated; for example, clay and metal vessels such as bowls, vases, jars, pans, and cauldrons. Weapons and tools were found in the graves under the floor of some houses, including arrowheads, axes, spearheads, knives, pitchforks, shears, needles, nails, sickles, as well as other objects, such as divine statuettes, reels for spinning, gold and lapis lazuli jewelry, seals, and belt loops (Emre 2008; Kulakoğlu and Kangal 2010; Özgüç 2003: 142–281). Some rare texts record house inventories; one refers to the household of a woman that contained,

among other things, grooved stands, lamps, bowls, measuring cups, various vessels, spoons, tables, containers, and cauldrons (Kt h/k 87; Dercksen 1996: 77; Michel forthcoming: no. 135).

Religion

Since Old Assyrian texts deal mainly with trade, our knowledge of religion during this period is quite limited. Some texts refer to goods as belonging to temples or gods, e.g. gold and silver given as votive offerings (*ikribū*; Dercksen 1997), or refer to oaths taken in the name of various deities, who are also invoked as witnesses; they also refer to names of priests participating in the overland trade (Hirsch 1972). Many gods were venerated in Ashur, including Adad, Amurru, Assur, Aššuritu, Belu, Ilabrat, Išḫara, Ištar the Star, Ištar.ZA.AT, Ninkarrak, Nisaba, Suen, Šamaš, Šarramaten, and Tašmetum (Eidem 2004; Dercksen 2005b; Kryszat 2003, 2006a, 2007b); among these, some also appear as family or personal gods, such as Amurru, Ilabrat or Ištar.ZA.AT (Kryszat 2006b; Michel 1991: 85–8; Veenhof, 2014a). Most of these divine names also occur as parts of personal names (Veenhof 2008 : 102–5).

The main god was Assur, with whom the king of Ashur had special ties. The Assyrians had to take oaths on the weapon of Assur (*patrum, šugari’um*; Donbaz 2001), which was kept in the sacred precinct (*ḥamrum*), while women took oaths on the tambourine of the goddess Ištar (Michel 1997c; forthcoming: no. 244–5). Girls consecrated to the god Assur did not belong to his temple but lived independently, perhaps nearby, certainly praying to the deity; but otherwise, we know nothing about their religious duties (see above, “Consecrated women”).

The temples of Adad, Assur, Ištar, and Išḫara served as warehouses for merchandise and votive offerings that they managed, but the treasure (*maššartum*) of the god Assur might have been kept in the City Hall since it was under the responsibility of the steward (*laputtā’um*; Dercksen 2004a: 77–9; Matouš 1974b; Veenhof in this volume). In Kaniš, oaths were sworn at the gate of the god Assur, also called the sacred precinct, which might have represented a chapel dedicated to the god as part of the *kārum* office complex. Priests of Adad, Assur, Ištar, Suen, Šamaš, and Šarramaten are cited for their role in the trade: Mannuba, priest of Assur, was the recipient of silver earned from trade in Anatolia (TC 3, 203), and a priest of Suen possessed one of the few “houses” where it was possible to buy both tin and textiles that would be exported to Anatolia (TC 3, 129). Among the Ashur eponyms are Elali, the chief temple administrator (*sangūm*), and Iddin-Aššur, son of a priest

(Veenhof 2003, Kryszat 2004).

Women's letters show their strong concern for religion: they made offerings to temples, paid tribute to gods, and reminded their husbands of their duties to the deities. Women involved in the public life of Ashur often had religious functions; several occupations linked to religion were traditionally held by women, such as dream interpreter (*šā'iltum*), diviner (*bārītum*), and consecrated woman (*gubabtum*, *qadištum*). Two women wrote to a close relative:

Here (in Ashur), we ask(ed) female dream interpreters, female diviners, and spirits of the dead; the god Assur gives you a serious warning. You love silver and despise your life! Can't you satisfy Assur here, in the City? Please, as soon as you have heard (the words of) the letter, come, see Assur's eye and save your life!"

(Michel 2001: no. 348, 2009c, forthcoming: no. 253)

In each Assyrian trading post in Anatolia, there was a shrine or a sacred area devoted to Assur, where the god was represented by his statue with his weapon and jewelry. Other Assyrian deities were worshipped there too. Just as in Assur, Assyrians took oaths there, in front of the divine emblems of Assur. In the town of Uršu, in the area of Gaziantep, robbers once entered the Assur temple and stole the emblem and golden medallion of the god (Larsen: 261–62; Michel 2001: no. 51).

Writing and archives

Data about daily life come predominantly from the numerous letters found in the archives of merchants and exchanged between the different members of the family, and, more specifically, from the women's correspondences (Michel 2001; 2008d; Michel, forthcoming). Archives of an Assyrian family could include hundreds or more texts dealing, firstly, with the long-distance trade, and, secondly, with other topics, such as daily life. They were arranged on shelves along the walls of houses or in wooden boxes and clay jars with clay labels to specify their content (Larsen 2008; Michel 2008e; Veenhof 2003a, 2013). Envelopes of letters and contracts, as well as clay labels, bear cylinder seal imprints as a kind of signature and a mark of ownership; sealed legal texts were thus certified (Larsen 1997b; Tessier 1994). The syllabary in use during the Old Assyrian period is relatively simple, with no more than 150 to 200 signs, and with very few logograms and complex syllabic signs. Letters often seem to have been written by their authors – the need of the merchants to move around may explain why they did not use the services of scribes. Scribal apprenticeship could take place in the house of a master who taught a small number of pupils (CCT 4, 6e:4–16), but many learned the basics of

writing at home, which allowed them to write their own correspondence and personal notes. Tablets perfectly formed and covered with a regular script can be distinguished from others that are awkwardly shaped and roughly written (Michel 2008a).

It is possible that not only men, but also some women learned how to read and write (Michel 2009d; forthcoming: [chapter 4](#)). Among the tablets sent, both by men and women, some display so many mistakes in signs and grammar that they were most likely written by the authors themselves.

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Further Reading

There is no book entirely dedicated to Old Assyrian society, but many articles concern topics related to this theme. Information on the citizens of Ashur and Kaniš is provided by Barjamovic 2014, Hertel 2013, 2014, Larsen 2015, Veenhof 1995a, and, with regard to slaves, Kienast 1984. Assyrian families are studied by Michel 2001: [chapter 6](#) and Veenhof 2014a; for the family as a commercial network, see Larsen 2007. A sample of one hundred women's letters is provided in Michel 2001: [chapter 7](#); see also Michel 2013a, 2015c and, for Assyrian and Anatolian women, Michel (forthcoming), which deals with marriage and divorce (see also Michel 2006b), the place of women in the family, maternity, housewives, businesswomen, and the moral and religious values of women; it also gives some three hundred texts in translation. Children are studied in Michel 1997d. For inheritance practices and last wills, see Hecker 2004a, 2004b, Michel 2000b and Veenhof 2011a. Michel 2008f, 2009b, Veenhof 1998, and 2008a deal with death and burials. For agriculture, cattle breeding, and food production, see Atici 2014, Dercksen 2008a, 2008b, Fairbairn 2014, Michel 1997a, 2006c, 2008c, 2009a, 2014d; for houses and their inventories Kulakoğlu and Kangal 2010, Michel 1997b and Veenhof 2011b; and for textiles Michel 2006d, Michel and Veenhof 2010. Data about markets, craftsmen, and loan contracts may be found in Dercksen 2004a, Michel 2013b, 2015b, and Veenhof 2008. An overview of Old Assyrian religion is presented in Hirsch 1972; Kryszat 2003, 2006a, 2006b and 2007b are focused on specific gods, while Michel 2009c discusses the role of consecrated girls; see also Michel (forthcoming): [chapter 5](#). Old Assyrian writing, counting, and metrology are analyzed in Barjamovic 2015, Michel 2006a, 2008a, and in press.

CHAPTER 5

The Transition Period (17th to 15th Century BCE)

Shigeo Yamada

The period from the 17th to the 15th century BCE marks the transition between the Old Assyrian and the Middle Assyrian periods, which are much better documented. In the Old Assyrian period, the state of Ashur consisted only of the small, self-governing, mercantile city of Ashur. In the Middle Assyrian period, it developed into a large territorial state organized into provinces, spreading over the lands along the Tigris River and in the Jazira. The “transition period” between these two historical phases is one of Mesopotamia’s “dark ages.” The historical developments in and around the city of Ashur are, at best, opaque and often entirely unknown, due to the extreme shortage of sources.

In the latter part of the Old Assyrian period, during the 18th century BCE, the city of Ashur was largely under the domination of external powers. It was ruled by the Amorite kingdom, which was established over most of upper Mesopotamia by Šamši-Adad I (or Samsi-Addu in his native Amorite language) until his death around 1776 BCE. His son Išme-Dagan I continued to rule the city of Ashur as the religious capital of his shrunken kingdom, alongside his administrative capital, Ekallatum, which was located just a short distance to the north of Ashur.¹ The kingdoms of Ekallatum, Ešnunna, and Babylon all controlled Ashur at some point during the obscure period of c. 1775–1720 BCE, although the city seems to have retained some autonomy, its basic institutional fabric as a city-state, and its mercantile colony in Anatolia. Our knowledge of the city of Ashur in this period is gleaned from documentary evidence mainly from upper Mesopotamia, particularly Mari (Tell Hariri), Qaṭṭara (Tell al-Rimah), and Šeḫna (Tell Leilan), and from Kaniš (Kültepe) in central Anatolia. Information from all of these sources comes to an end around 1720 BCE, with the end of *kārum* Kaniš Ib, which marks the beginning of the “dark age” or “transition period” to be dealt with below.

Two King Lists and the Period after Šamši-Adad I

Royal inscriptions and archival texts relating to the rulers of the city of Ashur are scanty at best for the 17th–15th centuries BCE, although chronographic sources edited in later periods, such as king lists and chronicles, record a line of kings who ruled the city of Ashur. Sources outside of Ashur do not shed much light on Ashur and its vicinity either, except for a few pieces of circumstantial evidence originating from Hittite Anatolia and from Nuzi (Yorgan Tepe), a town east of Ashur (see below, “Mittanian Dominion”).

Given the lack of detailed contemporary sources, one must consider the political history of Ashur in the post-Šamši-Adad I period on the basis of the standard version of the Assyrian King List (Grayson 1980–83: 101–15; hereafter abbreviated as AKL) and another king list fragment from Ashur, KAV 14 (Grayson 1980–83: 115–16). The texts were edited in later periods, and their reliability should be critically checked.

AKL, known from five manuscripts of varying length, covers the long period of Assyrian dynastic history from ancient times down to the Neo-Assyrian period. Some circumstantial evidence suggests that the present form of the list was established in the 13th century BCE at the latest and then entered a process of periodic updating; the latest surviving exemplars include royal names continuing down to the eighth century BCE. The list describes the period that we are considering, from roughly the mid-18th to the late 15th centuries BCE, as follows:

(40)² Išme-Dagan (I), son of Šamši-Adad (I), ruled for forty years.

(41) Aššur-dugul, son of a nobody, (who) had no right to the throne, ruled for six years.

During the time of Aššur-dugul, son of a nobody, (42) Aššur-apla-idi, (43) Našir-Sîn, (44) Sîn-namir, (45) Ipqi-Ištar, (46) Adad-šalulu (and) (47) Adasi, six kings, sons of a nobody, each ruled for “(*the beginning of*) a one-year period (*bāb tuppišu*)”.³

(48) Bel-bani, son of Adasi, ruled for ten years.

(49) Libaya, son of Bel-bani, ruled for seventeen years.

(50) Šarma-Adad (I), son of Libaya, ruled for twelve years.

(51) IB.TAR-Sîn, son of Šarma-Adad (I), ruled for twelve years.

(52) Bazaya, son of Bel-bani, ruled for twenty-eight years.

(53) Lullaya, son of a nobody, ruled for six years.

(54) Kidin-Ninua,⁴ son of Bazaya, ruled for fourteen years.

(55) Šarma-Adad (II), son of Kidin-Ninua, ruled for three years.

(56) Erišum (III), son of Kidin-Ninua, ruled for thirteen years.

(57) Šamši-Adad (II), son of Erišum (III), ruled for six years.

- (58) Išme-Dagan (II), son of Šamši-Adad (II), ruled for sixteen years.
- (59) Šamši-Adad (III), son of Išme-Dagan (II?),⁵ (who was) the brother of Šarma-Adad (II), son of Kidin-Ninua, ruled for sixteen years.
- (60) Aššur-nirari (I), son of Išme-Dagan (II), ruled for twenty-six years.
- (61) Puzur-Aššur (III), son of Aššur-nirari (I), ruled for fourteen (var. twenty-four) years.
- (62) Enlil-našir (I), son of Puzur-Aššur (III), ruled for thirteen years.
- (63) Nur-ili, son of Enlil-našir (I), ruled for twelve years.
- (64) Aššur-šadûni, son of Nur-ili, ruled one month of days.
- (65) Aššur-rabi (I), son of Enlil-našir, removed [Aššur-šadûni from the throne]; he took the throne [and ruled for x years].
- (66) Aššur-nadin-aḥḫe (I), son of Aššur-rabi (I), [ruled for x years].
- (67) Enlil-našir (II), his brother, [removed him] from the throne (and ruled for six years).
- (68) Aššur-nirari (II), son of Enlil-našir (II), ruled for seven years.
- (69) Aššur-bel-nišešu, son of Aššur-nirari (II), ruled for nine years.
- (70) Aššur-rem-nišešu, son of Aššur-bel-nišešu, ruled for eight years.
- (71) Aššur-nadin-aḥḫe (II), son of Aššur-rem-nišešu, ruled for ten years.

According to AKL, Šamši-Adad I's dynasty and its rule over Ashur ended with the forty-year-long reign of his son, (40) Išme-Dagan I. However, the "forty," possibly just a typological number, is suspicious, and its historical reliability is often doubted by scholars. Išme-Dagan's grip on Ashur, as well as on his capital Ekallatum, was not very stable, as revealed by letters from Mari; he had to leave and to return to the region several times during the eleven years after the death of Šamši-Adad I (Charpin and Durand 1997). As stated above, the city of Ashur probably enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy, even under the influence of different external powers in the post-Šamši-Adad I period. The six-year reign of (41) Aššur-dugul – during which six other individuals (nos. 42–7), perhaps just year eponyms, are said to have ruled briefly – is described in AKL as a period of transition, dominated by illegitimate rulers, "sons of a nobody," before a stable dynastic line was established under (48) Bel-bani.

In spite of the reasonable doubt concerning the length of Išme-Dagan I's reign, the lengths of the following reigns listed in AKL should be regarded as authentic in principle, since such data probably originate from reliable chronographic records, i.e. eponym lists and chronicles. Chronographic texts that meticulously count the number of years have indeed survived from the

Old Assyrian and later periods (Biro 1985, Millard 1994, Barjamovic et al. 2012), suggesting that the same sort of documents were continuously produced in the city of Ashur even during the “dark age” or “transition period.” In contrast, the genealogical data given in AKL for the period from (48) Bel-bani to (71) Aššur-nadin-aḥḥe II (1390–1381 [1400–1391]⁶) are revealed to be often unreliable, reflecting editorial work using incomplete data during a later period (Landsberger 1954: 42–4; Yamada 2003). Therefore, the dynastic line presented in the pertinent part of AKL must be regarded with some skepticism.

KAV 14 represents a different tradition about the dynasties that allegedly ruled the city of Ashur. The list enumerates three dynasties in historical order, separating them with dividing lines: the native Old Assyrian dynasty preceding Šamši-Adad I (ll. 1’–3’), the Amorite dynasty of Šamši-Adad I (ll. 4’–5’), and the subsequent line of the kings of Ashur (ll. 6’ ff.):

(lacuna)	
1’. (36) [Puzur]-Aššur (II), [son of Šarru-kin(?)]	
2’. (37) [Naram]-Sîn, [son of Puzur-Aššur (II)(?)]	
3’. (38) [Er]išum (II), [son of Naram-Sîn(?)]	
4’. (39) [Š]amši-Adad (I)	(40) Išme-[Dagan (I)]
5’. (40a) [Mu]t-Aškur	(40b) Rimu[š] ⁷
6’. (54) [Ki]din-Ninua	(55) Šarma-[Adad (II)]
7’. (56) [Er]i[šum (III)]	(57) Šamši-[Adad (II)]
8’. (58) [Išme-Da]gan (II)	(59) Šamši-[Adad (III)]
9’. (60) [Aššur-nirari (I)]	(61) Puzur-Aššur (III) [(...)]
10’. (62) [Enlil-našir (I)]	(63) Nur-ili [(...)]
11’. (64) [Aššur-šaduni]	(65) Aššur-[rabi (I)]
12’. (66) [Aššur-nadin-aḥḥe (I)]	(67) En[lil-našir (II)]
13’. (68) [Aššur-nirari (II)]	(69) [Aš]šur-[bel-nišešu]
(lacuna)	

Especially noteworthy is the reference to two names not found in AKL, i.e. [Mu]t-Aškur and Rimu[š] of the Šamši-Adad dynasty. Mut-Aškur is attested in a number of letters from Mari as the son of Išme-Dagan I. He was old enough in the 1760s BCE to lead an army and to plan to marry a daughter of the king of the Turukkeans (Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 218 and 236). It is thus possible that he later, towards the end of the 18th century BCE, ascended his father’s throne in Ekallatum and ruled the nearby city of Ashur as well. If this is the case, AKL has omitted him and his possible successor(s), who may have ruled Ashur from Ekallatum. However, the possibility that they ruled only Ekallatum and its vicinity without maintaining control of Ashur cannot be ruled out.

Curiously enough, KAV 14 opens the third dynastic line only with (54) Kidin-Ninua, omitting thirteen names found before him in AKL, from (41) Aššur-dugul to (53) Lullaya. One might thus suppose that KAV 14 has a chronological gap covering their reigns, a total of ninety-one years (according to AKL). It is also possible, however, that KAV 14 preserves a tradition that originated in Ekallatum and listed the kings who had ruled that city, including kings of Ashur who had ruled Ekallatum as well. According to this hypothesis, the reigns of Mut-Aškur and Rimu[š] could overlap with at least part of the ninety-one-year period from (41) Aššur-dugul to (53) Lullaya in AKL, who ruled only in Ashur.

An inscription of Puzur-Sîn, a ruler of Ashur who is, oddly, absent from the entire king list tradition, has survived on an alabaster slab from Ashur. This text adds further information of extraordinary significance relating to the post-Šamši-Adad I period:

When Puzur-Sîn, vice-regent of the god Assur, son of Aššur-bel-šamê, destroyed the evil of Asinum, offspring of Šamši-[Adad] who was ... of the city of Ashur, and instituted *proper rule* for the city of Ashur; (at that time) [I (Puzur-Sîn) removed] ... a foreign *plague*, not of the flesh of [the city] of Ashur. The god Assur justly ... [with] his pure hands and I, by the command of Assur himself my lord, destroyed that improper thing which he had worked on, (namely) the *wall* and palace of Šamši-Adad his grandfather (who was) a foreign *plague*, not of the flesh of the city of Ashur, and who had destroyed the shrines of the city of Ashur. I destroyed that palace ... which he had worked on. I built a wall from the *façade* of the gate of the deity Ilula to the residence, (a structure) which no (other) king had ever built before ...

(Grayson 1987: 77–8, A.O.40.1001, ll. 1–35; cf. Galter 2002–05)

Although the translation of the text must remain somewhat tentative because of its poor state of preservation, it apparently describes a dynastic change that occurred in the city of Ashur. It records that Puzur-Sîn ascended the throne by deposing a certain Asinum, a descendant of Šamši-Adad. Removing the “alien blood,” he destroyed the wall and the palace of Šamši-Adad and built a new wall. Šamši-Adad, whose “non-Assyrian” extraction is scornfully emphasized in this text, should probably be identified with Šamši-Adad I, whose foreign Amorite origin is beyond any doubt (Grayson 1985). Puzur-Sîn obviously considered himself a “genuine Assyrian” who was restoring a native dynasty, customs, and practices to the city-state of Ashur. J. Reade suggested that the text does not talk about an individual king named Asinum, but rather about an *assinnu(m)*, i.e., an androgynous lower class figure serving a female deity, and that it uses the term as a contemptuous nickname in order to emphasize the sacrilegious behavior of Šamši-Adad and his family (Reade 2001). Reade proposed identifying the person evicted in the Puzur-Sîn inscription with

Rimu[š], the last of Šamši-Adad I’s descendants attested in KAV 14.

The reality hidden behind the contradicting details of AKL, KAV 14, and the Puzur-Sîn inscription remains opaque (Table 5.1). It appears, however, that there were struggles between different parties for the throne of Ashur around the turn of the 18th and 17th centuries BCE. From an ethno-linguistic viewpoint, three major groups could have been involved in the events. The first were the native Akkadian-speaking citizens of Ashur, whose view was fully represented in the inscription of Puzur-Sîn. The second were the Amorites, who were led in this region by the descendants of Šamši-Adad I, and who presumably ruled with Ekallatum as their capital. There were also the Hurrian-speaking groups, who had kept some influence over the city of Ashur from the beginning of the second millennium BCE, as suggested by some Hurrian names included in the earlier parts of AKL (Kikkiya, Akiya). It seems that Hurrian influence weakened in the area around Ashur with the Amorite advance in the 18th century BCE. But the Hurrians returned later and were very active in upper Mesopotamia, where they formed the powerful state of Mittani in the 15th century BCE (see below, “Mittanian Dominion”). It is also possible that there was tension between the supporters of different philosophies of kingship. Traditional Assyrian “royal” power was limited and counterbalanced by the civil community, represented by the “city assembly” (*ālum*) and the “eponym office” (*bīt līmim*), as seen in the Old Assyrian period. This traditional civil order must have survived into the transition period and may have clashed with the more universal kingship style adopted by the Amorite kingdom of Ekallatum.

Table 5.1 Names of rulers in AKL, KAV 14, and the Puzur-Sîn inscription

<i>AKL</i>	<i>KAV 14</i>	<i>Puzur-Sîn inscription</i>
(40) Išme-Dagan I	(40) Išme-Dagan I	Asinum(?)
(41) Aššur-dugul	(40a) Mut-Aškur	Puzur-Sîn
(42–47) Aššur-apla-idi, Našir-Sîn, Sîn-namir, Ipqi-Ištar, Adad-šalulu, Adasi	(40b) Rimu[š] (54) Kidin-Ninua ...	
(48) Bel-bani		
(49) Libaya		
(50) Šarma-Adad (I)		
(51) IB.TAR-Sîn		
(52) Bazaya		
(53) Lullaya		
(54) Kidin-Ninua		
...		

One should ask why Puzur-Sîn was not considered in the king lists. It is possible that his reign was neglected and/or forgotten with the rise of the

prestige of Šamši-Adad I's dynasty in Ashur in later times (see below, "Signs of Prosperity"). Or one may explain the omission of Puzur-Sîn by hypothesizing that AKL has a chronological gap, covering the reign(s) of Mut-Aškur, Rimu[š], and Puzur-Sîn, between (40) Išme-Dagan I and (41) Aššur-dugul (Landsberger 1954: 36–8). However, one may also propose a totally different hypothesis, which would support a lower chronology: one could postulate that the rulers of Ashur from (41) Aššur-dugul to (53) Lullaya, who appear in AKL but are omitted from KAV 14, were contemporaneous with the kings of Ekallatum, including (40) Išme-Dagan I, (40a) Mut-Aškur, and (40b) Rimu[š], placing Puzur-Sîn somewhere within this time range (Gasche et al. 1998: 52, Reade 2001: 5–8). Following this line of interpretation, Reade proposed that Puzur-Sîn be identified with (51) IB.TAR-Sîn of AKL, assuming that a conscientious scribe was confronted with a damaged *pù(KAxŠU)-zur*₈ and erroneously restored it as IB.TAR, a name element difficult to explain grammatically; the father of IB.TAR-Sîn/Puzur-Sîn is wrongly identified in AKL, according to Reade, as his direct predecessor (52) Šarma-Adad, based upon an erroneous assumption, instead of the correct Aššur-bel-šamê.

Setting apart the question of absolute chronology, whether we follow the middle chronology or a lower one, AKL possibly conceals the reality that the kingship of Ekallatum and Ashur was somehow split in two, with one polity at Ashur and the other at Ekallatum, for some decades after the reign of Išme-Dagan I. As of right now, however, there are no data to prove the accuracy of any of the aforementioned scenarios.

Signs of Prosperity

The first king mentioned in both AKL and KAV 14 after the divergent passage is (54) Kidin-Ninua, whose name means "(under) the protection of (the deity of) Nineveh (i.e. Ištar of Nineveh)." This personal name may suggest that the goddess, whose cultic center was Nineveh, the city located ca. 100 kilometers north of Ashur, was worshipped also in Ashur, but the political implications of the name remain obscure. The successors of Kidin-Ninua assumed a variety of names known from the Old Assyrian period, either native Assyrian names, e.g., Erišum (III), or names related to the Šamši-Adad dynasty, namely Šamši-Adad (II) and Išme-Dagan (II), reflecting the interest of the contemporary royal house in the successful Old Assyrian rulers of the past. Apparently, the prestige of Šamši-Adad I's family rose again in Ashur with the end of the bitter dynastic struggles between the Amorites and the native Assyrians in the city.

A certain degree of Assyrian prosperity in the subsequent period, from the latter half of the 16th to the beginning of the 15th century BCE, may be

reflected by the royal inscriptions of (59) Šamši-Adad III, (60) Aššur-nirari I, (61) Puzur-Aššur III, and (62) Enlil-našir (Grayson 1987: 79–97), which appear after a complete absence of such inscriptions since the Puzur-Sîn text. The inscriptions, written on bricks, stone tablets, and clay cones, reveal that many buildings first constructed in the Old Assyrian period, among them the Assur temple, the Anu-Adad temple, the Sîn-Šamaš temple, the temple of the Assyrian Ištar, and the city walls, were rebuilt during their reigns. (61) Puzur-Aššur III surrounded a larger area of Ashur with a great wall, as mentioned in a text known from several clay cones of (69) Aššur-bel-nišešu (1407–1399 [1417–1409]):

The great wall of the New City which Puzur-Aššur (III), the prince my forefather, had built – in the area of that wall I built a new wall. I applied a facing to all of it from the great wall of the Inner City as far as the river (Tigris).

(Grayson 1987: 100, A.O.69.1, ll. 5–9)

The statement documents the building of a fortified “New City (*ālu eššu*)” in addition to the old city that had been established in the Old Assyrian period and was later called the “Inner City (*libbi āli*).” Further light on the political circumstances of Ashur in the time of (61) Puzur-Aššur III is cast by a passage in the Synchronistic History, a Neo-Assyrian composition describing Assyro-Babylonian relations from the 15th to the beginning of the eighth century BCE:

Puzur-Aššur (III), king of Assyria, and Burnaburiaš, king of Babylonia, took an oath and fixed this very boundary-line.

(Grayson 1975: 158–9, i 5’–7’)

Accepting this evidence at face value, one may suggest that Puzur-Aššur III, at the turn of the 16th and 15th centuries BCE, ruled an area along the Middle Tigris that faced the territory of Kassite Babylonia, though the extent of his realm could still not have been very large. According to the annals of the Egyptian pharaoh Thutmose III (Breasted 1906: 191 f., §§ 446, 449; cf. also Helck 1962: 165), tribute from Ashur, including lapis lazuli, stone vessels, horses with equipment, and a variety of woods, was delivered to Egypt more than once during the pharaoh’s reign, around the middle of the 15th century BCE. This appears to have been part of an effort to enhance Ashur’s international standing in politics and commerce with the assistance of Egypt. Egypt was expected to check the rising influence of Mittani, the Hurrian kingdom whose realm was centered in the area between the Euphrates River bend and the upper reaches of the Tigris River, thus putting pressure on Ashur from the northwest.

Mittanian Dominion

In the subsequent decades in the latter half of the 15th century BCE, the city of Ashur was under strong pressure from Mittani. At the zenith of its power, between the mid-15th century and the mid-14th century BCE, Mittani extended its influence westward, deep into Syria as far as the Mediterranean coastal areas and eastward to the foot of the Zagros mountains, thus encompassing the entire Hurrian-speaking region. Sauštatar, a successful Mittanian king, who ruled in the second half of the 15th century BCE (Stein 1989), is said in the later Hurrian-Hittite treaty between Šattiwaza and Šuppiluliuma to have taken a door made of silver and gold from the city of Ashur as loot and to have set it up in his palace in his capital Waššukkanni; the door is said to have remained in Mittani until Šuttarna returned it to Ashur in the mid-14th century BCE (Weidner 1923: 38f. no. 2 = Beckman 1995: 49, no. 6B, obv. 8–10). It is difficult to say what the cause of this incident was; and it is unclear whether Ashur had been a client state of Mittani for some time, revolted, and then was punished, or whether it was first subjugated at this time. Be that as it may, the record clearly testifies to Mittanian politico-military pressure on Ashur in this period. Furthermore, texts from Nuzi dated to ca. 1430–1330 BCE show that Mittani kept its suzerainty over the kingdom of Arrapha that included the Hurrian-populated town of Nuzi and was located ca. 100 km to the east of Ashur. It is likely that Ashur was under strong influence from Mittani during the latter half of the 15th century BCE and probably the beginning of the subsequent one.

In spite of the apparent Mittanian supremacy over Ashur and its surroundings, there is some evidence for building enterprises and diplomatic efforts by Assyrian kings toward the end of the 15th century BCE. The clay cones of (69) Aššur-bel-nišešu (1407–1399 [1417–1409]), whose text is quoted above, document his construction of a new wall in Ashur. Furthermore, the Synchronistic History (Grayson 1975: 158, i 1'–4') states that Aššur-bel-nišešu made a treaty with Karaindaš of Babylonia and that they took an oath concerning the boundary between Assyria and Babylonia, just as Puzur-Aššur III and Burnaburiaš had done earlier (see above, “Signs of Prosperity”). Another piece of evidence is found in a letter of Aššur-uballit I (1353–1318 [1363–1328]) to Amenhotep IV (Moran 1987: 39, EA 16), according to which Aššur-uballit I's “(fore)father” Aššur-nadin-aḫḫe received 20 talents of gold from Egypt. It is disputed whether this Aššur-nadin-aḫḫe is the first (66) or the second (71) king of this name (Kühne 1973: 77–8, n. 387; Kühne 1999: 213, n. 105; Artzi 1978: 36); the former reigned before 1430, the latter from 1390–1381 [1400 to 1391] BCE. In any case, the delivery of a large amount of gold from Egypt testifies to the good diplomatic relations between Ashur and Egypt, whether it was tolerated by a Mittanian overlord or whether it is a testimony to Assyrian efforts to become independent from Mittani. In sum, it appears that Ashur's gradual transformation from a city-state with a small

hinterland to a state with some territory along the Tigris River started at least as early as the end of 15th century BCE, still under the shadow of Mittanian hegemony. However, one must wait for the mid-14th century BCE, in particular the reign of Aššur-uballit I, to find undeniable evidence for Assyria's independence and the state's rise as a major power of the ancient Near East.

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Further Reading

Important studies of the chronographic sources available for the “transition period” include Landsberger 1954, Yamada 1994 and 2003, Gasche et al. 1998, Reade 2001, Galter 2002–05, and Pruzsinszky 2009; the last-mentioned work conveniently summarizes previous discussions. On the Hurrians, see

Wilhelm 1982. The Mittanian dominion over Ashur is explored by Kühne 1999 and Lion 2011. On evidence for relations between Assyria and Arrapha, see Maidman 2010. On the mid-second millennium Mesopotamian dark age in general, see Hunger et al. 2004.

Notes

- 1 The location of Ekallatum is still in dispute; it was probably on the right bank of the Tigris River a day's walk north of Ashur (Charpin and Durand 1997: 372–74; Ziegler 2002).
- 2 The numbers in parentheses are given in order to facilitate the identification of each king. They follow those of Grayson 1980–3: 101–15.
- 3 The meaning and exact chronological connotations of the Akkadian expression *bāb tuppišu* have been in dispute. Baker's 2010 study suggests that it refers to a one-year period. For other views, see Freydank 2007 and Pruzsinszky 2009: 62–4, with bibliography cited there.
- 4 For the reading of this personal name as Kidin-Ninua, rather than Šu-Ninua, see Heeßel 2002.
- 5 This may be not Išme-Dagan II but a homonymous individual belonging to a different line descended from (54) Kidin-Ninua (Yamada 1994: 28 f., n. 51).
- 6 The lower numbers are the ones suggested by Boese and Wilhelm 1979.
- 7 There is insufficient space to restore another name in this line, despite the suggestion by Landsberger 1954: 31.

CHAPTER 6

The Middle Assyrian Period (14th to 11th Century BCE)

Stefan Jakob

Assyria Joins the Scene

In its beginning stages, the rise of the Middle Assyrian kingdom was closely linked to the fate of the Mittanian state. At some point during the second half of the 15th century BCE, the Mittanian king Šaušatar conquered Ashur. Since then, the rulers of the city governed a small client state, always hoping to find a way to throw off the yoke of Mittani and to regain independence. It required, however, a fatal period of weakness within the administration of the Mittanian overlord in order to achieve this objective. In the first half of the 14th century, Artašumara, the original heir to the Mittanian throne, was murdered by a certain Uṭḫi, who appointed the minor figure Tušratta as a puppet king in his place. As a result, the quarrel about power escalated and, shortly thereafter, induced the division of the Mittani state (Harrak 1987: 15–24).

Aššur-uballiṭ I, who came to power in the city of Ashur in 1353 BCE, took advantage of this situation. He allied himself with the land of Alše, northeast of the Mittanian heartland, against Tušratta, thus breaching his contract as a vassal. His pursuit of recognition as the ruler of an independent state is also reflected elsewhere, especially in two letters discovered in Tell el-Amarna in Egypt. The (presumably) earlier letter begins as follows: “Say to the king of E[gypt]: thus Aššur-ubal[liṭ, the king of Ass]yria” (EA 15, Moran 1992: 38). In the second letter, the salutation is considerably more elaborate: “To Napḫureya [great king], king of Egypt, my brother, s[ay]: ‘thus speaks Aššur-uballiṭ, king of Assyria, great king, your brother’” (EA 16, Artzi 1997: 322). Here, the Assyrian ruler presents himself as the ruler of a major power. Furthermore, as a “brother” of the pharaoh, he lays claim to equal status with him. Later, Aššur-uballiṭ explicitly emphasizes the equality between the king of Ḫanigalbat, i.e., Mittani, and himself (EA 16:26f.). This clearly indicates that the balance of power in northern Mesopotamia had changed decisively.

Mittani, for its part, had no chance to reestablish the previous order. After the loss of the western Euphrates River area, Tušratta was murdered by one of his sons, who apparently believed he was more capable of coping with Mittani’s problems – it was a fatal misjudgement on his part, as is often the case with impatient princes. The sovereignty of Mittani could not be regained in this

way.

As a result, several pretenders to the Mittanian throne struggled for the crown. From the Hittite sources, we learn that Šuttarna III, the son of the former Hittite ally Artatama II, secured the support of Assyria and Alše. Although he was successful, he paid a high price: prestigious booty from the time of Šauštatar, including a “door of silver and gold,” was returned to Ashur.

At that point, the Hittites defined in a treaty that descendants of Artatama would be excluded from succession. Instead, the Hittites chose Šattiwaza, the son of Tušratta, who had meanwhile returned from exile and offered the Hittite king his services (since his application for asylum in Babylon was rejected). The monarch also wanted to benefit from the dispute over the Mittanian throne by extending and securing his power base in the east Tigris River region at the cost of the kingdom of Arrapha. Aššur-uballiṭ, for his part, doubtlessly kept an eye on these activities since he was interested in the expansion of his own realm.

For a while, Arrapha seemed able to defend itself against Assyrian and Babylonian attacks but was forced to succumb in the end (Müller 1994: 4). The destruction of Nuzi was probably carried out by 1330 BCE at the latest (Stein 1989: 59; cf. RIA Bd. 9, 641). Even though the troops of Aššur-uballiṭ were primarily responsible for this military action, it did not have the effect of incorporating the city and its surroundings into the Assyrian realm. Most likely, the Assyrians withdraw into the Lower Zab, leaving the eastern part of the kingdom of Arrapha to the Babylonians (Wilhelm 1982: 50). From this point onwards, every battle for supremacy in the east Tigris River region would be a confrontation with Assyria’s southern neighbor.

Aššur-uballiṭ could not have had any political interest in a long-lasting conflict with Babylonia. The marriage of his daughter Muballiṭat-Šeru’a to the Babylonian king Burnaburiaš II, as recorded by Chronicle P (Grayson 1975: 171), could well have been in conjunction with a treaty that, perhaps, defined the common border. We may assume that the division of the spheres of influence east of the Tigris River played an important role.

This alliance did not have only supporters at the Babylonian court. After several years, the anti-Assyrian coalition finally succeeded in overthrowing Karindaš, the son of Burnaburiaš. His mother, Muballiṭat-Šeru’a, a symbol of Assyrian heteronomy, was probably killed during the rebellion. Aššur-uballiṭ was subsequently forced to march to Babylonia in order to replace the usurper, whom Chronicle P refers to as “Šugaš, son of a nobody” (Synchronistic History: Nazibugaš), with Kurigalzu (II), another son of Burnaburiaš (Grayson 1975: 159). Aššur-uballiṭ could not have known what the consequences of such a decision would be for both sides.

His successor, Enlil-nirari (1317–1308 BCE), found himself confronted with the fact that Kurigalzu failed to remain loyal to the Assyrians. As we learn

from the chronicles, these two adversaries confronted each other as enemies at Sugaga, a day's journey south of Ashur near the Tigris River (Nashef 1982: 235), to do battle. The result of the confrontation is assessed differently depending on the provenance of the later commentator. The Babylonian Chronicle P laconically notes that Kurigalzu went to Assyria to fight his adversary, whose name is erroneously given as Adad-nirari (cf. Mayer 1995: 190, fn. 2). Not only, according to this source, did the Babylonians win the battle, but they also captured several Assyrian captains. By contrast, the Assyrian "Synchronistic History" claims the victory for the Assyrians and adds two details: that the Babylonian camp was carried off and that the boundary was redefined: "They divided the districts from Šasili (of) Subartu [to] Karduniaš into two (and) fixed the boundary-line" (Grayson 1975: 160).

Later tradition suggests that the Assyrian version is closer to the truth (RIMA 1, A.O.76.1:25f.). But how threatening the situation was for Assyria during this phase is well illustrated by another chronicle fragment, which records a Babylonian attack on the Kilizu area, not far from Ashur (Grayson 1975: 185). Even if the Assyrians were able to defend their heartland, this event obviously left an impression. They had to prevent any further attempts by Babylonians to reach that very district again. In the future, the Babylonian outposts in the east Tigris River region would become an object of particular attention.

Indeed, the treachery of Kurigalzu resulted in trauma, which had not been overcome even one hundred years later. This is revealed in Tukulti-Ninurta I's speech in a passage of his famous epic about his victory over the Babylonian king Kaštiliaš (IV) at the end of the 13th century BCE. When describing his adversary as degenerate, wicked, obstinate, and disobedient, Tukulti-Ninurta points to the traditional image of the depravity of Babylonian rulers that began with Kurigalzu. The "treaty of the fathers" referred to in the epic was concluded – so we may assume – while Aššur-uballit was still alive. But after his death, Kurigalzu broke the treaty. It is here that the "traditional enmity" between Assyria and Babylonia began, which culminated – according to Assyrian opinion – in the divinely ordained defeat of Kaštiliaš.

However, it was still a long way there. The successor of Enlil-nirari, Arik-denili (1307–1296 BCE), does not mention Babylon at all. Indeed, he seems to have had no major successes against Assyria's southern neighbor. Among the few inscriptions available, only one contains some hint as to military activities (RIMA 1, A.O.75.8). The topographical names, as far as they are preserved and can be located, point to the region between Nineveh and the Zagros Mountains, situated, therefore, beyond the Babylonian sphere of influence (Figure 6.1).

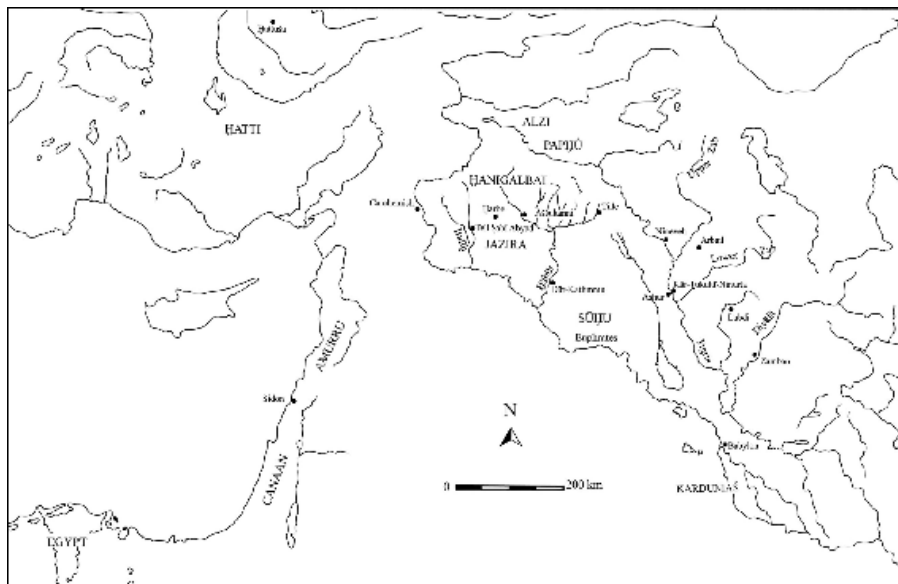


Figure 6.1 The political landscape of the Middle Assyrian period.

Source: Stefan Jakob. Reproduced with permission of Brill.

The First Half of the 13th Century BCE

Arik-den-ili's son, Adad-nirari I (1295–1264 BCE), had far more room for political manoeuvring and was the first Assyrian king to include narratives of his military campaigns in his royal inscriptions. There, he describes his conflict with Šattuara I, king of 𒀭anigalbat, whom he accuses of having committed hostilities against him. In his own words: “I seized him and brought him to my city Ashur. I made him take an oath and allowed him to return to his land. Annually, as long as he lived, I regularly received his tribute within my city Ashur” (RIMA 1, A.O.76.3:9–14).

Afterwards, Wasašatta, the son of Šattuara, decided to cease tribute payment. Adad-nirari went to battle against him and was victorious again. As part of a punitive action, he annexed several important cities within the Khabur region. In Taidu, one of the major residences of the former Mittani state, he built a royal palace (RIMA 1, A.O.76.22:55–60).

With regard to his hostility against the Kassites (mentioned alongside the “hordes” of the Qutû, Lullumu, and Šubaru), Adad-nirari called himself a follower of his grandfather, Enlil-nirari (RIMA 1, A.O.76.1:3f.; 31f.). The explicit reference to the strategically important Babylonian border towns of Lubdi and Rapiqu as targets of military action is the first evidence of a new strategy pursued by the Assyrian high command: hegemony over

Mesopotamia as a whole, with a focus on Babylonia as the main opponent. A genuine success could be achieved solely if Assyria was able to control not only the area south of the Lower Zab as far as the Diyala River, but also the Middle Euphrates River region. Notwithstanding the martial tone of the inscriptions, however, it is understood that Adad-nirari, in a way that was similar to his policy in the Khabur region (RIMA 1, A.O.76.1:13ff.), confined himself to restricted attacks that primarily served to add to his own prestige. Neither Lubdi nor Rapiqu were kept permanently.

But the Babylonian king Nazi-Maruttaš took up the gauntlet and mustered his troops to put Adad-nirari in his place. According to the “Synchronistic History,” the decisive battle took place near Kar-Ištar south of the Lower Zab, where Nazi-Maruttaš was defeated. Another inscription of Adad-nirari mentions, additionally, the looting of the Babylonian camp (RIMA 1, A.O.76.21). Finally, as the “Synchronistic History” reports, the boundary-line was probably fixed anew, in favor of the Assyrians, from Pilašqi east of the Tigris River via Arman in Ugar-Sallu to Lullumu.

If this is true, the Assyrians would have succeeded in building on the past successes of Enlil-nirari and would have enlarged the Assyrian realm as far as forty-six miles south of the Lower Zab. It remains, however, somewhat questionable as to whether the region was integrated permanently. Shalmaneser I (1263–1234 BCE) possibly had to leave the areas south of the Lower Zab, if we may interpret the silence of the sources to that effect, to the Babylonians. Neither the royal inscriptions of that time, nor the aforementioned chronicles, reveal any information about conflicts between Assyria and Babylonia. This view may need to be reconsidered if new sources are discovered. One hint may come from a reference to Shalmaneser in a historical review of Assyro-Babylonian relations within the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic (Machinist 1983: 78f.).

Still, contemporary administrative documents indicate that various cities on the eastern bank of Lower Zab belonged to the Assyrian state at that time. It can be proven that Atmanu (modern Tell Ali; cf. Fadhl 1983: 126ff.; 360) was part of an Assyrian “district” (*pāḫutu*). In the city of (N)arzuḫina (Ismail and Postgate 2008: 151; 162), the residence of a “mayor” (*ḫazi’ānu*) is traceable, beginning in the era of Shalmaneser I. Regarding the cities of Turšan, Sira, and Tarbašḫe, we have a report about the registration of crop yields from the final phase of the first decade of Shalmaneser’s reign (eponymate of Aššur-kašid; see Bloch 2008: 146).

There were also other challenges to meet, including military actions against Uruaṭri and North Syria (RIMA 1, A.O.77.1:22–106). The mention of Aḫlamu nomads as allies of the Hittites and Šattuara II (the king of what had remained of the Mittanian state) shows clearly that, at this time, non-sedentary groups within the Jazira region were beginning to represent a decisive factor in politics. They were still referred to exclusively as adversaries. It is clear

that both sides had not yet recognized the advantages of cooperation in certain areas.

It is no coincidence, incidentally, that the Hittites appear in the list of Assyria's enemies. It is well known that, in the time of Adad-nirari I, the Assyrian envoys were treated poorly at the Hittite royal court, presumably by Urḫi-Teššub (Klengel 1999: 269), the nephew and predecessor of Ḫattušili III, who was overthrown by the latter around 1266 BCE. If nothing else, the still-smouldering conflict with Egypt may have forced Ḫattušili to seek a better relationship with Assyria. Unfortunately, Shalmaneser rejected this offer (Hagenbuchner 1989: 242ff.) in an insulting manner, as we learn from a letter by Ramesses II to Ḫattušili (Edel 1994: 25). There, the Assyrian king is quoted as stating: "You (i.e. Ḫattušili) are (merely) a substitute of a great king" (*pūḫšu ša šarri rabî atta*), alluding to the usurpation of the Hittite throne by the former.

In the following years, the relations between Ḫatti and Assyria remained strained. In an administrative document from the eponym year of Ekaltayu (most probably 1241 BCE; see Bloch 2008: 147) a campaign to Amurru, a Hittite vassal state, is mentioned (cf. Postgate 1988: 170ff.). After the accession of Tudḫaliya IV, possibly in 1237 BCE (Bryce 1998: 326), the situation continued to escalate. A letter from the Assyrian king to Ibiranu, the ruler of Ugarit, provides us with details about a decisive encounter near the city of Niḫriya (Dietrich 2003; differently Singer 1985). Tudḫaliya accused his adversary of having lured his vassal Eḫli-šarri, king of Išuwa, away. Threatening him with military retaliation, he began to deploy his troops in Niḫriya. Shalmaneser felt provoked and laid siege to the city, which he calls hostile. After fruitless negotiations, the Assyrian army attacked the Hittite camp, massacring their enemies. This battle was, irrespective of whether the historical details are accurately reported or not, the beginning of the end of Hittite influence in upper Mesopotamia.

Territorial Expansion and Consolidation: A First Attempt

After the death of Shalmaneser I, his son Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233–1197 BCE) ascended the throne. A common feature of ancient Near Eastern rulers is their desire to surpass their predecessors. In Tukulti-Ninurta's case this seems extremely pronounced. His reign is characterized by the unconditional will to create something that would last forever. This applies not only to his decision to build a new residence a few miles upstream of Ashur, named after the king himself (Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta), but, especially, to military activities meant to extend his realm.

The Hittite king Tudḫaliya must have been well informed in advance about the character of the future king. Otherwise, in addition to the letter of congratulations on the occasion of Tukulti-Ninurta's accession to the throne, Tudḫaliya would certainly not have planned to send another tablet to the vizier Babu-aḫa-iddina, marked by a certain effort to, first, improve the relationship between the two kings, as compared to the era of Shalmaneser I, and, secondly, to exercise considerable influence upon the new king so that he would abandon any intention to attack the mountain regions northwest of the Assyrian heartland, which were clearly claimed by Ḫatti (Mora-Giorgieri 2004: 155ff.). Tukulti-Ninurta, however, was not impressed by these admonitions, which were only thinly veiled with flatteries (see Bryce 1998: 348f.).

According to Tukulti-Ninurta's official inscriptions, he conquered the districts in question in a campaign that was one of the most outstanding achievements of his first regnal years. The early successes evidently encouraged Tukulti-Ninurta to pay special attention to the eastern Tigris River region. The fact was that he intended to extend his power at the expense of his southern neighbor, as explicitly set forth in several early inscriptions (RIMA 1, A.O.78.1:24–37; A.O.78.2:17ff.; A.O.78.8:6'–10'; A.O.78.9:10'–27'; A.O.78.10:24ff.). There are proud reports of his acquisitions south of the Lower Zab, especially in the area between the cities of Šasili and Mašḫaṭ-šarri. It seems that Tukulti-Ninurta was raising a claim to districts which were "traditionally Assyrian" in his view, since they were added to his land by treaty in the days of his ancestor Enlil-nirari (Grayson 1975: 160, 21'). The immediate reaction of the Babylonians remains unknown. But it is hardly to be expected that they would have shared the Assyrian's interpretation of history. Before long, the conflict escalated. Tukulti-Ninurta himself reports on the events:

I approached Kaštiliašu, king of Karduniaš, to do battle. I brought about the defeat of his army (and) felled his warriors. In the midst of that battle I captured Kaštiliašu, king of the Kassites, (and) bound I brought him as a captive into the presence of the god Assur, my lord. (Thus) I became lord of Sumer and Akkad in its entirety.

(RIMA 1, A.O.78.23:60ff.)

There is a general assumption that Tukulti-Ninurta's invasion of Babylonia was an unprovoked attack (Cancik-Kirschbaum 2003: 51). Occasionally, it is also considered a preventive war (Mayer 1995: 50; 215, see also Llop 2003a: 205). As Cancik-Kirschbaum has pointed out, for Assyrian kings, peace with the world outside of Assyria was only possible by treaty or by subordination to Assyrian rule (1997: 75). In the sense of this ideology, treaties with their immediate neighbor, Babylonia, as an opponent of equal standing, were of special importance (cf. Brinkman 1990). The Tukulti-Ninurta Epic is an

extraordinary contemporary source to study *in extenso* the Assyrian view of the confrontation with Babylonia. Although it can hardly be called a “propaganda poem” (Ebeling 1938: 1ff.) in the true sense of the word (i.e. used to justify the policy of the king before a “public opinion” in Assyria, see Mayer 1995: 50, 215ff.), it seeks to prove primarily that the war against Babylonia was a just one, assisted by the great gods of heaven and earth. The character sketch of Kaštiliaš as a vicious, perfidious, and cowardly person may well have been exaggerated, but according to Assyrian legal opinion he really *was* a perjurer who was abandoned by the gods and received his well-deserved fate. The Assyrian king is solely acting according to divine order.

The offences of Kaštiliaš, including plundering Assyrian territory, deportations, atrocities against civilians, and the violation of sanctuaries (Machinist 1983, 86f., col. iii), were not necessarily fictitious. The Babylonians, no less convinced of their own perspective, continued to claim the area east of the Tigris River, potentially by military means. It should not be excluded that they also tried to repel the Assyrian expansion by attacking the heartland of Assyria from Arrapha or Lubdi.

What might be the true point of contention – in Tukulti-Ninurta’s view – is revealed in the passage of the epic wherein he enumerates every single transgression of Kaštiliaš before the divine judge Šamaš, raising the tablet of the treaty between the two kings to heaven (Machinist 1983: 88ff.). During a trial, which takes place in the absence of the accused, it becomes obvious that the Babylonian king was seen merely as the last link in a chain, which began with Kurigalzu (II), who once went to war against Enlil-nirari, neglecting the oath between Assyria and Babylonia by doing so. Likewise, the poet of the epic puts a repentant monologue into the mouth of Kaštiliaš, characterized by contrition and referring to the “unalterable treaty of the fathers” (*rikilti abbēya ša lā šumsuki*).

Thus, the quarrel over the eastern Tigris River region could probably represent the real cause of escalation in the course of the confrontation. From the Assyrian point of view, the conditions, which were defined one hundred years ago, should have been regarded as permanent and final. But since Babylonia refused to accept this position, an open conflict between the two powers became inevitable (cf. Cancik-Kirschbaum 1997, 72).

To properly assess the numerous individual pieces of information about the Assyro-Babylonian War from literary tablets and documents, we need an exact chronological framework. In recent years, the situation in this regard has improved greatly: a series of four successive eponym years from Etel-pî-Aššur to Aššur-zera-iddina has been securely reconstructed (Jakob 2013: 514–22; cf. Bloch 2010). This makes it possible to correlate information from dated royal inscriptions with the evidence from administrative texts and gives us an opportunity to look at the historical events at the end of the 13th century BCE in a new light.

The earliest documents concerning the Babylonian campaign date back to the year of Etel-pî-Aššur, when the victorious Assyrian army returned to the royal residence Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta. On the 10th day of the month Ša-kenate (ix), we learn from an administrative text, Babylonian (in Assyrian usage “Kassite”) people were supplied with bread (MARV IV 40). The account was settled using the “seal of Aššur-iddin, the vizier.” There is no doubt that we later see him as a grand vizier (Jakob 2003: 55ff.). The tablet provides the earliest evidence for the presence of Babylonian prisoners of war in Assyria.

Another receipt (MARV viii 51) dates to the 29th day of the month Muḥur-ilane (x) and records the feeding of donkeys over a period of ten days. These are the “donkeys of the road” (*emārū ša ḫūle*) that carried armor when the army returned from Babylonia (MARV I 1 Rv. iv 40ff.).

From this tablet we also learn that on the 15th day of Abu-šarrane (xi), the armed forces were back in the capital. They are referred to as “starving,” which indicates that the return was strenuous rather than glorious, contrary to the relevant chapter within the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic.

Soon afterwards, between the 23rd day of Abu-šarrane and the 12th day of Ḫibur (xii), several people received rations in Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta who are identified as coming home from an expedition to Suḫu. They were meanwhile – according to the text – employed at the ziggurat and the palace of the royal residence (Llop 2010: 109ff.). At least thirty-eight soldiers (*ša ḫurāde*) who participated in the Suḫu campaign with the king returned to Ashur via Nemad-Ištar. If the suggested localization of that city near Tell ar-Rimah is correct (Nashef 1982: 204), this would prove again that the connection between the capital and the districts in the Lower Khabur region was not necessarily maintained by a steppe route (Jakob 2006: 18f.).

In addition, a group of Assyrians is identified as refugees from Babylonia returning to the royal residence. This reveals significant contradictions between official Assyrian sources and the situation in Babylonia after the withdrawal of the Assyrian army. The royal court in Ashur was more than likely displeased by such news.

The information from administrative documents of the eponym year Etel-pî-Aššur could be interpreted to support the idea that a first military action against Babylonia was, all in all, successfully completed, although the armed forces were pushed to the limit of their capabilities. This is particularly true since apparently only one section of the army left Babylonia and headed northward after the victory over Kaštiliaš. While the main forces, led by the king’s heralds, returned to Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta (MARV I 1 IV 27–44), a second branch of the army marched to the Middle Euphrates River region, under the guidance of the king (Llop 2010: 108ff.; cf. Arnaud 2003, 8). It remains unclear to what extent this operation was successful, but there are indications in our sources that Dur-Adad (elû), a city of strategic importance

in the Middle Euphrates River area, then became part of Assyria (Jakob 2013: 511 note 10).

Remarkably, one century later, a similar strategy led to success during the first Babylonian campaign of Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 BCE), who provided specific details with regards to his route: he went from the eastern bank of the Lower Zab to the surrounding countryside of the city of Arman in Ugar-Sallu until Lubdi and along the Ḥamrin Mountains up to the crossing of the Radanu river (modern Nahr al-‘Uzem or Ṭawuq Gay) toward the Diyala River. It was there that the attacks on major centers in North Babylonia began, including Dur-Kurigalzu and Sippar-ša-Šamaš (RIMA 2, A.0.87.4:37–43). Given that Šamši-Adad V (823–811 BCE) followed essentially the same itinerary during his campaigns against Babylonia (RIMA 3, A.0.103.1: iii 70bff.), one might assume that this path was not chosen by chance, but rather with regard to topographical conditions.

There is some corresponding information about military actions under Tukulti-Ninurta I in the eastern Tigris River region. In Tell Imlihiye, about sixteen miles southeast of Zamban, the remainders of an originally more extensive archive of cuneiform tablets, spanning more than thirty years until the sixth regnal year of Kaštiliaš, were discovered in a jar. The excavators argued that the documents were possibly placed in a safe location in the face of the enemy’s approach (Böhmer-Dämmer 1985: 18–19). If the destruction of level II was actually caused by the Assyrians and rebuilding took place during the reign of Enlil-nadin-šumi, the successor of Kaštiliaš, Tell Imlihiye could well have been part of the itinerary of the first expedition. Otherwise, no definitive statements can yet be made about this itinerary. All additional evidence for Assyrian troop movements in settlements between the hinterland of Ashur and the Diyala region dates, as will be described below, from later years, which suggests that Tukulti-Ninurta, trying to avoid a second front, did not aim to conquer the Babylonian territories in the Eastern Tigris region at this point.

The army rather advanced directly southwards or southeast to the Diyala River, perhaps via Tell Imlihiye. From there it probably targeted – as Tiglath-pileser I would do one century later – Babylonian cities such as Dur-Kurigalzu and Sippar. According to the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic, Kaštiliaš first faced the enemy, confident of attaining a victory. But he was defeated in the first battle and therefore sought to avoid further confrontation afterwards, hoping to gain a victory in impassable terrain and with deceptive manoeuvres. As we know, the Assyrians were the ones who emerged victorious. While the captured Babylonian king was abducted to Assyria, his opponent Tukulti-Ninurta was enthroned above all other rulers and without any remaining rivals. At least, that is how the king saw himself according to an inscription (RIMA 1, A.0.78.23) on a stone tablet found in a foundation pit within the ziggurat of Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta (Galter 1988: 220).

A remark about Tukulti-Ninurta's rule as lord of Sumer and Akkad is followed in the inscription by a list of lands and cities that were acquired, as the structure of the text seems to suggest, immediately after the victory over Kaštiliaš. The list also includes, besides Mari, Ḫana, and Rapiqu, numerous lands with names of non-Semitic, perhaps Kassite or Hurrian, origin (Zadok 1995: 442f.). Apart from Arrapha (modern Kirkuk), the names occur almost exclusively in this text. While their exact location remains difficult to establish, they must have been situated in the area between the Ḫamrin and the Zagros mountains.

It is impossible to decide to what extent the Assyrians' grand claim of dominance corresponded to reality. Even contemporary administrative tablets provide only limited assistance in this regard. Although there is evidence for the existence of an Assyrian administration in the city of Arrapha about one decade later (eponym year of Salmanu-šuma-ušur; MARV II 17:44, Frag. 4:50'; MARV I 5:18), the reference to tribute paid by the lands named in A.0.78.23 is a clear indication that the Assyrian control was rather indirect at the time of writing.

It should not be excluded that the Assyrian army carried out military operations east of the Tigris River in conjunction with the campaign against Kaštiliaš, either in the beginning of the expedition or afterwards. But an incorporation of the districts in question into the provincial system of the state was apparently not achieved.

Another inscription from the ziggurat debris (RIMA 1, A.0.78.24) is of interest as well. The find's context suggests that it was deposited on a higher level within the brickwork, i.e. during a later construction stage. The text is closely related to the aforementioned one because of the reference to 28,800 "Hittite people from beyond the Euphrates" who were deported to Assyria at the beginning of Tukulti-Ninurta's reign. This episode has been a subject of controversy among scholars, in particular because it is missing from the king's earlier inscriptions (Galter 1988).

Emphasis should be placed on the changes as compared to the presumably older version RIMA 1, A.0.78.23. While the report of military successes in the north and northeast, as well as in Syria, has been shortened and the listing of the lands conquered after the victory over Kaštiliaš is missing, the king's titles now include "King of Karduniaš," "King of Sippar and Babylon," and "King of Tilmun and Meluhha," indicating an Assyrian claim to power in the area of the Persian Gulf. A.0.78.24 must have been written after the prestigious conquest of Babylon. Taking the find's circumstances into account, we may presume that, as a result of this historically important event, the earlier version within the foundation was regarded as in need of revision and therefore replaced.

The king's distinctive pride in what was achieved seems all the more

understandable if we consider to what extent the time since the beginning of the conflict with Babylonia had been a time of changes. There are some hints in administrative tablets that indicate that the victory over Kaštiliaš had been dearly bought. It has already been mentioned that the army had not been supplied with rations on the way home and, therefore, soldiers were “starving” by the time they returned to the capital, not to mention the Assyrian refugees from Babylonia.

In the surroundings of Dur-Katlimmu on the Khabur River, no harvest took place in the eponym year of Etel-pî-Aššur due to hostile acts (Röllig 2008: n.79:11f.). Moreover, until the year after the following year, the eponymate of Aššur-bel-ilane, sowing sesame and spices remained impossible (Röllig 2008: n.106). The city of Duara, administered by the provincial capital Dur-Katlimmu, seems to have been lost, at least temporarily, if we may interpret the information about an enemy having taken the city wall to this effect (Röllig 2008: n.80:18f.). These short notes from administrative documents clearly suggest that during the eponym year in between (Ušur-namkur-šarre), the security situation in the Lower Khabur region was likewise unstable. The identity of the “enemy” harassing Assyria remains unknown to us. It cannot be excluded that these attacks were somehow related to nomadic raiders, who were already causing problems for the Assyrians in the Khabur region for some time. The father of the present grand vizier Aššur-iddin, according to Babylonian sources, had already been forced to fight vigorously against warriors of Aramaean stock (Gurney 1949: 139). At the end of the 13th century BCE, the hazardous situation concerning the Aramaeans, who operated from Suḫu, continued (Singer 2008: 237). The attackers may have profited from the fact that Tukulti-Ninurta was leading a campaign elsewhere, perhaps on the northeastern border of the state (MARV IV 146:12’–14’). Thus, the garrisons of the Khabur region could not have counted on his support.

Another crisis originated with an Elamite military intervention in Babylonia during the reign of the Babylonian king Enlil-nadin-šumi, as reported in Chronicle P. We do not know in what way the Assyrian command responded to these challenges. Enlil-nadin-šumi could not keep himself in power much longer and was replaced by Kadašman-Ḫarbe II who was surely grateful to the Elamites.

With this background, it is not surprising that in Tukulti-Ninurta’s report about the restoration of the Sîn-Šamaš temple in Ashur, which dates to the following eponym year of Aššur-bel-ilane (RIMA 1, A.0.78.18), neither Babylonia nor the capture of Kaštiliaš are mentioned, while the king refers in some detail to his successes north and northeast of his state.

During the same year, the situation changed decisively. Right at the beginning of the following eponym year (Aššur-zera-iddina), Babylonian prisoners of war found themselves in Ashur. We may assume that they were linked to the

ships coming back from the sea mentioned in KAJ 106. The booty also included a substantial amount of small livestock, as we learn from an administrative document (MARV 27 + MARV III 54) that registers the delivery of wool to builders and their teams who worked at the temple of the god Marduk, probably in Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta. It is certainly not a matter of chance that the provisions were taken from stocks whose origin was clearly Babylonia, the homeland of Marduk.

Everything suggests that another Assyrian campaign to Babylonia had been successfully completed. Meanwhile, three years had passed since the victory over Kaštiliaš. That is exactly the timespan that is given by the Babylonian King List as the reigns of both of his successors, Enlil-nadin-sumi and Kadašman-Ḫarbe II, together. This would mean that Adad-šuma-iddina was now in charge of governing Babylonia (see *RIA* 6: 91). In the light of the sources presented here, we can hardly doubt that his accession was supported by Assyria. This becomes even clearer by the fact that, only a few months later, the Assyrian king set out southwards again, this time immediately to the city of Babylon. This was obviously not a military campaign but a journey meant to make offerings to Babylonian gods, a remarkable event that has come down to us in the date formula of an administrative document (MARV VIII 7:7–11). Such an incident requires political conditions that would enable the Assyrian ruler to come to the Babylonian capital as a guest in a non-military context.

The situation seems similar to that described later by Shalmaneser III in connection with his support for the Babylonian monarch Marduk-zakir-šumi against his brother and rival Marduk-bel-usati: after the victory over the usurper, Shalmaneser went to Babylon to make sacrifices to Marduk and his spouse (RIMA 3, A.O.102.5: v 3b–vi 1a). Even the occurrence of “many prisoners” (MARV VIII 7:12, *šallata¹ ma’da*; see Jakob, forthcoming) who were brought to Ashur by Tukulti-Ninurta could be explained by the fact that these men were followers of the overthrown Kadašman-Ḫarbe and were removed by the Assyrians in order to weaken any opposition (Jakob 2013: 517).

For a short while, the situation within the formerly threatened districts of the Assyrian state became more peaceful. In Dur-Katlimmu on the Lower Khabur, for example, the harvest accounts from the previous year were settled (Röllig 2008: n.80). But very soon afterwards, it became obvious that Adad-šuma-iddina, who was once happy to accept Assyrian assistance for his usurpation, would henceforth be unwilling to act as a puppet king, as the Assyrians had intended.

The first severe crisis may be dated to the eponym year of Ina-Aššur-šumi-ašbat. In a letter from a certain Qarrad-Aššur to his father, the grand vizier Aššur-iddin, from the 6th day of the month of Kuzallu (v) we learn that the city of Lubdi in the Eastern Tigris River region was besieged.

A refugee who fled from the inner city reports that the inhabitants had provisions for only two more months. One and a half weeks earlier, Aššur-iddin was already dealing with troops from Lubdi in his correspondence (Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996: 154f.). At this point, the grand vizier saw himself forced to intensify his efforts to support the city, after receiving an explicit rebuke from the king himself concerning hesitance on the grand vizier's part regarding Babylonia (Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996: n.9, 36–42). In his communication from the 5th day of the month of Sîn, the monarch let him know that the entire land of Karduniaš would have been “like a richly laid dining-table.” Was he implying that the Assyrians did not sufficiently pursue the Babylonian troops and these troops, therefore, made up ground in such a way that they strengthened important cities like Lubdi?

The inscription RIMA 1, A.O.78.6, a stone tablet from Ashur describing work on the New Palace, dating to the year in question, alludes to the preceding victory over Babylonia only in the form of epithets like “(the one who) brought about the defeat of Sumer and Akkad” and “(the one who) captured Kaštiliašu.” Considering another inscription from the year of Aššur-bel-ilane, RIMA 1, A.O.78.18, which shows an almost identical inventory of epithets (cf. Cifola 2004: 8) and which was clearly written in a phase when Assyria was largely deprived of influence in the South, a similar situation should also be assumed for the current eponym year.

We do not know the further fate of Lubdi, but there is some evidence that Adad-šuma-iddina was ultimately forced to give in.

According to an administrative notice, on the 24th day of Ša-kenate, the Assyrian king was staying in the city of Dur-Adad (elû), the town on the Middle Euphrates River that was – as mentioned above – captured by the Assyrian army during the first Babylonian campaign of Tukulti-Ninurta. This visit is most likely linked to a letter bearing the date formula “day 21,” written by a certain Aššur-tapputi on behalf of the royal administration and addressed to the grand vizier Aššur-iddin while residing in Dur-Katlimmu (Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996: 147–53). From this communication it becomes clear in what way the “provisioning” (*piqittu*) for every member of a royal travelling group should be supplied during their upcoming stay in that city. Here, the mention of the “Kassite king” with his wife and a royal household is of special interest. They are travelling – presumably coming from the Assyrian capital – accompanied by a high-ranking Assyrian delegation, most likely with Tukulti-Ninurta himself.

It would be helpful if the sender of the letter had revealed the identity of that “Kassite king,” but an entire series of indicators suggest that it was not Kaštiliaš, who was already living in Assyria for years as a hostage, but rather Adad-šuma-iddina, who was the reigning king in Babylon at this point of time; only the latter, the acting Babylonian monarch, would have been allowed – according to Assyrian legal views – to claim the title “king.”

The month of Ša-kenate took place after the months of Sîn and Kuzallu, in which the siege of Lubdi was a matter of concern for the grand vizier and his staff. The journey of Adad-šuma-iddina to Assyria might have been motivated by a royal order from his overlord to take a new oath of allegiance, most likely in conjunction with sanctions in case of infringement.

Superficially, Tukulti-Ninurta may have shown strength. Letters from various official archives in the western part of the realm, however, clearly demonstrate that he, too, was interested in stabilizing Assyro-Babylonian relations as soon as possible. Besides the usual obligations such as leading patrols, the surveillance of agricultural production, personnel administration, jurisdiction, and difficulties with nomads, there were constantly new, unexpected incidents, demanding a quick response. A few examples may suffice to illustrate the problem:

- Within the district of Aššukanni, the harvest fell victim to locusts. The urban population left the city, and thus nobody was available anymore to guard a group of fifty Kassite and Hurrian prisoners (BATSH 4/1, 2; month of Sîn, 20th day).
- Fifty soldiers disappeared after receiving their provisions. Elsewhere as well, officials complained about a grievous lack of personnel. This was exceedingly unwelcome news since the enemy had assembled an army of 1,500 men near the Hašumu Mountains to attack the Assyrian territory (BATSH 4/1, 3; month of Kuzallu, 5th day).
- A raid on the provincial capital Ḫarbe in northeastern Syria resulted in the loss of humans and animals. There would be no harvest that year (BATSH 4/1, 4; month of Kuzallu, 22th day).
- In the following month, the situation within the region of Ḫarbe remained precarious. A caravan returning from Carchemish was attacked and robbed on Assyrian territory. The merchants were to be compensated (BATSH 4/1, 6; month of Allanatu, 27th day).
- A notice about two Sutians “hanging around” and finally being picked up gave rise to the suspicion that nomads were involved in some of the aforementioned conflicts (BATSH 4/1, 13; month of Belat-ekalli, 24th day).
- Five-thousand men were mustered to lay siege to a city whose name remains unknown to us. It seems to have been an extensive operation. It should be noted that the four divisions of the army, having returned from their first campaign to Babylonia, were hardly more extensive (see above MARV I 1). A further 1,000 men helped to arrest a “servant” of the addressee of the letter (i.e. the grand vizier?). It is also interesting that there were “officers of Karduniaš” who were under Assyrian command. The date formula of the letter has been lost, but it

seems most likely that it was written in the same year as the examples above, i.e. at the time of Adad-šuma-iddina's visit to Assyria. If that is the case, the Babylonian soldiers were evidently viewed as an integral part of the Assyrian army (BATSH 4/1, 8).

During the following years, the political situation in Assyria continued to change. The mountain regions northwest and northeast of Assyria gave rise to some cause of concern, both in Uqumanu (MARV IV, 148; eponym of Kaštiliaš) and the area north of the Syrian Jazira (Jakob 2009: 92f.; eponym Ber-išmanni).

At some point, Adad-šuma-iddina seems to have attracted the wrath of the Assyrian king yet again. It should not be excluded that there were poor counsellors at his court. On the other hand, the king could have acted on his own initiative. Be that as it may, Tukulti-Ninurta began another campaign to the south. The punitive action was not only targeted at the disloyal vassal himself but equally at the inhabitants of Babylon. This time, the city was looted and the statue of the god Marduk abducted to Assyria (Yamada 2003: 162).

The sequence of eponyms during the second decade of Tukulti-Ninurta's reign cannot be determined with absolute certainty. Thus, one can only guess that the campaign against Zamban "on the bank of the Diyala River," recorded in an administrative notice (MARV I 9) from the eponym year of Qarrad-Aššur, son of Aššur-iddin, may be related to the conquest of Babylon. The text lists a large amount of barley, sesame, and groats that was imposed on Zamban as a tribute. The military units mentioned in the text are, in part, the same ones as those who participated in the first Babylonian campaign of the year of Etel-pî-Aššur, in particular the four so-called *lê'u* divisions (cf. Freydanck 2001). Although a connection to the second campaign to Babylon cannot be proved, it seems to be quite plausible.

At the beginning of the eponym year of Ninu'ayu, however, the international community was apparently reacting to the new situation. Within a period of two months, several letter orders from the office of the grand vizier were sent to district governors of three provincial capitals in North Syria (Jakob 2009: 59–69) concerning international delegations from the Great powers Ḫatti and Egypt, but also from Amurru and from the city of Sidon. According to these documents, the foreign delegates were on their way home from Ashur after having had an audience with the Assyrian king. The list of provisions for every envoy and his escort, plus horses and donkeys, provides us with detailed information about the composition of the respective delegation.

The Hittite Teli-Šarruma may well have been a member of the royal family from Carchemish (cf. Adamthwaite 2001: 64). His delegation had four chariots, three mule-drawn wagons, and six donkeys. All in all, there were sixteen people who received beer, bread, meat, and spices, whereas the chariot

drivers were supplied with beer of a higher quality than the rest of the group. The emissary of the Pharaoh, a certain Milku-ramu from Sidon, had only one chariot and three donkeys. With him was Yabnan from Amurru. He was accompanied by another three men. All of these four travellers went on foot with ten donkeys.

About five days afterwards, the Assyrian “foreign office” announced another delegation from Sidon, this time representing the city itself (Jakob 2009: 68f.). Contrary to the usual proceedings, only the origin of the delegate is mentioned and his name omitted. The amount of food supplied for the delegation corresponds to the provisions of the aforementioned Yabnan.

The Assyrian scribes meticulously registered what was brought to the king in Ashur. Usually, he received both letters and a gift from a foreign ruler, so it is quite interesting to observe that the Egyptian envoy bore only some tablets with communications. It appears as if the Pharaoh did not attach great importance to his relationship with Assyria. Nevertheless, he was surely attempting, as were all of the other rulers who were sending their delegates, to hear about the plans of the conquerer of Babylon firsthand.

Moreover, Amurru and Sidon could evaluate their present political stance towards the major powers Ḫatti and Egypt on the one hand and the future possibilities of a new coalition on the other. The Hittites, however, were interested in cultivating good relations with Assyria. During the course of the year, a lively exchange of messengers can be observed on the overland route in North Syria (Jakob 2009: 5). Ḫatti was hence willing to accept the claim by Tukulti-Ninurta of his lordship over Babylonia. If the anti-Assyrian party was still active there, it could hardly hope for help from its former ally.

The south, in the meantime, seems to have been systematically exploited. In the (presumably) following year (Abi-ili, son of Katiri; see Freydank 1991: 62f.), the construction of cargo ships was commissioned “to transport” great amounts of barley “from the Babylonian campaign” to the Assyrian heartland (MARV IV 34:15–18).

Assyria now extended from the “Upper Sea to the Lower Sea,” and Tukulti-Ninurta I was at the zenith of his power. As the “king of the extensive mountains and plains,” he ruled over the lands of Šubaru, Qutû, and Nairi, receiving tribute “from the four quarters” (RIMA 1, A.O.78.24:16–20). The Eastern Tigris River region was most likely under Assyrian control as well after regional centers like Arrapha had been integrated into the administrative structure of the state. In the west, where the anonymous “enemy” had constantly caused trouble in recent years, the Assyrian army, headed by Tukulti-Ninurta himself, achieved considerable successes while thousands of workers were employed at the royal palaces in Ashur and Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta (MARV II 17). But the triumph did not last long. Assyria’s forces were overstrained, they were just enough to win battles but they were not sufficient

to secure the conquered lands permanently. So, the tide turned again.

The resistance against the Assyrians presumably grew in the southwest of Babylonia first, closely associated with a certain Adad-šuma-ušur. Chronicle P ascribes the liberation of Babylonia from Assyrian rule to him: “The Akkadian officers of Karduniaš had rebelled and put Adad-šuma-ušur on his father’s throne” (Grayson 1975: 176). In two inscriptions on bronze daggers from a private collection (Dossin 1962: 151), the new ruler calls himself a son of Kaštiliaš. Apart from this, Adad-šuma-ušur never gives a filiation.

In a letter from the Elamite king Kutir-Naḥḫunte (or Šutruk-Naḥḫunte?), we find Adad-šuma-ušur among several usurpers who are blamed for illegally seizing the throne of Babylonia in contradiction to Elamite claims. There, the name of his father is given as Dunna-Šaḥ and his origin as the Middle Euphrates River region (*ša aḥ Puratti*). Since this “letter” is a literary creation of the first millennium BCE rather than an authentic document from the end of the 13th century BCE (Brinkmann 2004: 292), this information does not have to be taken literally. Nonetheless, there is perhaps an element of truth in the text.

It may be that Adad-šuma-ušur actually did come from Suḫu and styled himself as a descendant of Kaštiliaš only later, trying to establish a connection to times prior to the Assyrian invasion. Or he truly was his legitimate successor and had gone into exile to Suḫu after his father’s defeat to envisage the reconquest of Babylonia from there. In both cases, it seems reasonable to assume that he was the “servant of Suḫu” mentioned in a letter from Tukulti-Ninurta to the Hittite king Šuppiluliuma II (Singer 2008; for a different view cf. Durand and Marti 2005: 127–9). Several fragments of this communication, dating back to the eponym year of Ili-padâ, are known today (KBo XXVIII 61–4). The Assyrian king complained to the Hittite king that he had remained silent on the usurpation of the “servant of Suḫu” (in Babylon?), which was an illegal seizure of power against Assyria’s interests. This reproach was all the more serious since diplomatic contacts between Assyria and Ḫatti went far beyond tolerance at this time, comprising not only economic, but also military cooperation (Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996: 117–28; Singer 2008: 237).

However, reading between the lines, it is possible to detect an increasing internal isolation of Tukulti-Ninurta. Maybe there were also some opposition parties at the royal court who were dissatisfied with the king’s policies. At least, that is how the following words in KBo 28.63:9’ might be understood: “If I am alive, [I will send(?)] a message of/about my life, but if I am dead, the message of/about my death [will be sent to you(?)]” (see Singer 2008: 226).

At this time, a bilingual prayer (KAR 128) might have been written wherein the aged monarch draws a positive picture of his reign, emphasizing his piety and faithfulness to the god Assur (see Foster 2005: 318–23): “I am he who ensures your rites, who keeps your ablutions pure. My prayers are continuous

before you, every[where]” (l. 55’–56’).

This is in direct contrast to an eloquent lament over the wickedness of all the people of the world and their ingratitude to the Assyrian king: “The lands of one accord have surrounded your city Ashur with a noose of evil. All [of them] have come to hate the shepherd whom you named, who administers your people” (l.17’). In contrast to official inscriptions, in this text Tukulti-Ninurta was not afraid to admit defeat and failures: “Your enemies and foes are glowering at [your standing?] place. They have concerted to plunder your country, O Assur, ... and to destroy your cities, they strive above and below” (l. 24’–25’, 27’).

In fact, there was little left of the glory of days past. In the view of Tukulti-Ninurta, Babylonia belonged to the countries that he had acquired by the command of his lord Assur. If, in the meantime, someone else had been able to seize power, the sorrow of the Assyrian king was more than understandable. But the conflict with the suspected “servant of Suḫu” must have begun much earlier. According to the Babylonian King List, Adad-šuma-ušur ruled for thirty years. Excluding the Assyrian seven-year interregnum, he follows immediately after Adad-šuma-iddina, i.e. the years of Tukulti-Ninurta’s reign were credited to him by later Babylonian tradition.

The earliest evidence for his control over the city of Babylon dates to Adad-šuma-ušur’s 27th regnal year (Yamada 2003: 166). It seems, therefore, reasonable to assume that the compilers of the King List simply summarized several stages of Adad-šuma-ušur’s rule. In the initial phase, perhaps even already during the reign of the Assyrian puppet king Adad-šuma-iddina, he arguably took the city of Ur, attempting to gain more influence in the north. It is known, for example, that he carried out restoration works on sanctuaries in Nippur and Isin (Walker 1982: 405).

Given that Adad-šuma-ušur may well have been the natural son of Kaštiliaš IV and may have sought safety in Suḫu after the latter’s defeat and deportation, it comes as no surprise that the Babylonian elite regarded the support of Adad-šuma-ušur as a welcome opportunity to restore the independence of their land after the latter had established a power base in the southwest of Babylonia.

The Decline of Power in the Period after Tukulti-Ninurta I

After Assyria’s loss of dominion over its southern neighbor, trust in the authority of Tukulti-Ninurta might have declined noticeably in his own land. Finally, in the 37th year of his reign, the time came for a violent overthrow.

Chronicle P blames a certain Aššur-našir-apli for the crime. He had rebelled with the officers of his land and had put Tukulti-Ninurta inside of a room in his own palace with the intent to murder him (Grayson 1975: 176).

Considering the well-known problems with personal names in Chronicle P, we should expect confusion with the prince Aššur-nadin-apli, who, in fact, succeeded to the throne of his father, reigning for another period of six years (see Pedersén 1985: 107, fn. 5). One of the leaders of the conspiracy seems to have been Ili-padâ (the eponym of the aforementioned letter from Tukulti-Ninurta to the Hittite king). Years later, he still retained a central position at the royal court after succeeding his brother(?) (Jakob 2009: 5) Salmanumušabši in the office of the Grand Vizier. This function comprised, quite similar to the time of his grandfather Qibi-Aššur, the title of “King of Ḫanigalbat” (*šar Ḫanigalbat*). That is why Adad-šuma-ušur rightly contacted both Aššur-nirari III (1192–1187 BCE) and Ili-padâ, as demonstrated by a literary royal letter which questioned their kingship (ABL 924; see Llop and George 2001/2002: 10). Incidentally, the insults of the Babylonian concerning their supposed incompetence and drunkenness are a clear indication that the balance of power had, meanwhile, shifted. But the decline of Assyrian power would continue for a while longer. The next king on the Assyrian throne was Enlil-kudurri-ušur (1186–1182 BCE), a son of Tukulti-Ninurta, as his two predecessors were. His relationship with the branch of the royal dynasty to which the suspected conspirer Ili-padâ had belonged suffered serious deterioration at this time. Perhaps the new king was a member of a party at the Assyrian court that had remained loyal to his father. The Assyrian King List reports, at any rate, that Ninurta-apil-Ekur (1181–1169 BCE), son of Ili-padâ and offspring of Eriba-Adad, went to Babylonia. From there, he finally returned to Ashur to seize the throne (Foster 2005: 142).

These events took place during the reign and within the realm of Adad-šuma-ušur. Therefore, it can be assumed that Ninurta-apil-Ekur was supported by the Babylonian king. According to the Synchronistic History, the latter approached Enlil-kudurri-ušur to do battle while Ninurta-apil-Ekur tried to take this opportunity to seize power in the city of Ashur. Chronicle 25 considers Enlil-kudurri-ušur to be the aggressor who, after he was defeated in battle, was surrendered to Adad-šuma-ušur by his own people (Yamada 2003: 156–9). So it was another case of high treason that ended Tukulti-Ninurtas I’s direct line of descent.

In the face of the episode in Chronicle 25, according to which Adad-šuma-ušur had conquered Babylon only now, it seems that he had ruled only a part of the country until then. The opponent, whom he overthrew during his final attack on Babylon, is characterized as a nobody who had no legal claim to the throne. Thus, it can be assumed that Assyria had no further role in the allocation of power. Adad-šuma-ušur reached his goal, but there was little time to enjoy this success. He died shortly after the enthronement of Ninurta-

apil-Ekur.

This king, during the twelve years of his reign, was apparently not able to place much emphasis on foreign policy issues. Like his three immediate predecessors on the Assyrian throne, he could save very little of what the three prominent ancestors – Adad-nirari I, Shalmaneser I, and Tukulti-Ninurta – had established and created in the course of a century. This also resulted in a relatively low yield of monumental inscriptions. Only Aššur-nadin-apli, the aforementioned son and successor of Tukulti-Ninurta, left a report concerning a large-scale building project within the capital (RIMA 1, A.0.79.1). In the decades to follow, there were other priorities to consider, as we have seen.

Some time after the death of Ninurta-apil-Ekur, the situation apparently changed for the better, at least in terms of the ongoing Assyro-Babylonian conflict. According to the “Synchronistic History,” the cities of Zaban, Irrija, and Ugar-Sallu were conquered (Grayson 1975: 162; cf. J. Llop 2003b) during a campaign of Aššur-dan I (1168–1133 BCE) against the Babylonian king Zababa-šuma-iddina. This clearly suggests that Assyria, even during this period, had not abandoned all its ambitions of gaining control of the districts south of the Lower Zab. Rather, the state was waiting for its chance to regain a strong position vis-à-vis Babylonia.

In Ashur, an archive was unearthed that covers more than one year of activities in an office for receiving “audience gifts” (*nāmurtu*) to the prince Ninurta-tukulti-Aššur. The provenance of the supplicants is often specified, so we have a good impression of the extent of the Assyrian realm at this time (Pedersén 1985: 56–68). The documents mention the cities of Kulišḫinaš and Amasakku in the Khabur basin, as well as Arrapha and (N)arzuḫina east of Ashur, and the land of Suḫu (see Llop and George 2001/02: 15). It is from there that the *nāmurtu* of a certain Adad-šuma-iddina was delivered. The gift was recorded as if it had been delivered by Assyrian officials, whereas the messenger of Mannu-lu-ya’u, a local ruler from Ṭabetu on the Khabur, was treated like a foreign delegate. Indeed, these two cases point to the fact that there were political structures within the Assyrian realm with varying degrees of independence from the central government. Be that as it may, the place names mentioned in the texts suggest that the border of Assyria extended roughly from the Khabur basin in the west to the Middle Euphrates River area in the southwest and to the region east of the Tigris River as far as the Zagros Mountains. The preceding conquest of Arrapha by the Elamite Šilḫak-Inšušinak (1150–1120 BCE) had not been followed by a permanent occupation (Potts 1999: 244).

After the death of Aššur-dan, as reported by the “Assyrian Kinglist,” his sons Ninurta-tukulti-Aššur and Mutakkil-Nusku struggled for power (Glassner 2005: 142). While the former went into exile in Babylonia, the latter usurped the Assyrian throne (Llop and George 2001, 8f.). The boundary line between both countries seems still to have run alongside the Lower Zab, as is shown in

another literary royal letter which refers to this phase. In the city of Zaqqā, which was under Assyrian administration since the 14th century BCE (Nashef 1982, 281), an encounter between a Babylonian king and Mutakkil-Nusku was supposed to take place.

The same town name, now spelled as Zanqi and called “a fortress of Assyria,” occurs in the “Synchronistic History” in a passage about the conflict between Aššur-reša-iši (1132–1115 BCE) and the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar I, during which the Babylonians burned their own siege engines in order to prevent them from being captured by the enemy. At another time, both protagonists were involved in a battle near Idu on the Lower Zab (see van Soldt 2008, 73). There, Nebuchadnezzar was not only beaten, but also lost his camp – at least, that is how the “Synchronistic History” records it (Grayson 1975: 163f.). According to other Assyrian sources, Assyria was in distress at the time of Nebuchadnezzar’s predecessor, Ninurta-nadin-šumi (1131–1126 BCE), but was saved by the courageous intervention of Aššur-reša-iši. The Babylonian king had already advanced to the city of Arbail when he heard of the approach of the Assyrian army and fled with his warriors. This episode cannot be found in official inscriptions of Aššur-reša-iši, but it seems to be close to reality insofar as, after the aforementioned incidents under Nebuchadnezzar, the Assyrians were able to defend their positions at the southeastern border. Aššur-reša-iši, it seems, had claimed the epithet “avenger of Assyria” for a reason.

Territorial Expansion and Consolidation: A Second Attempt

Aššur-reša-iši’s successor Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 BCE) was thus free to give a lower priority to the Eastern Tigris region after his accession and focus on new challenges. The report concerning his first five regnal years has come down to us on a dated prism (RIMA 2, A.0.87.1). Its introduction contains an elaborate list of epithets that clearly shows that this king was willing to speak much more confidently than his immediate predecessors. Tiglath-pileser calls himself, *inter alia*, the “unrivalled king of the universe, king of the four quarters, king of all princes, lord of lords ... whose weapons the god Assur has sharpened and whose name he has pronounced eternally for control of the four quarters ... splendid flame which covers the hostile land like a rain storm.”

One passage in the text is dedicated to the king’s victory over the Mušku people, who are mentioned here for the first time in Assyrian royal inscriptions (see *RIA* 8, 493f.). Maintaining that no king was able to vanquish them in battle until then, Tiglath-pileser claims to have confronted them

decisively in his accession year. Until then, they had control not only over the lands of Alzu and Purulumzu for the previous fifty years, lands formerly claimed by Assyria, but also over Katmuḫu. How their army of 20,000 men, under the leadership of five kings, was resoundingly defeated is depicted with bloodthirsty imagery. The surviving 6,000 men submitted to the Assyrian king, becoming his subjects (i 62–88).

Katmuḫu itself remained a trouble spot for years. Tiglath-pileser's first punitive action against it is said to have been a consequence of the cessation of tribute payment. Despite the fact that Katmuḫu was supported by the neighboring land of Paphû, the Assyrian ruler won a victory. The defeated king, Kili-Teššub, the son of Kali-Teššub, called Errupi, was deported with his family, and the royal palace was looted and destroyed (RIMA 2, A.O.87.1: i 89–ii 35). Urraṭinaš, a city ruled by a certain Šadi-Teššub that required the crossing of the Tigris River in order to reach it, suffered a similar fate.

Despite a remark that Katmuḫu was conquered as a whole, at least one additional campaign was necessary to reach this objective. This final expedition, which led to the devastation and looting of the country, took place in rough, mountainous landscapes and provided, therefore, an excellent opportunity to stress the special skills, courage, and bravery of the king.

In the west, likewise, Tiglath-pileser did not remain impassive. In the context of the reconquest of northern Syria, the lands of Alzu and Purulumzu, which had ceased paying tribute, were reminded of their duties. Kaška and Urumu warriors from the land of Ḫatti, i.e. Syria, who had occupied Assyrian territories with 4,000 troops, voluntarily submitted, as Tiglath-pileser would have us believe, immediately upon the king's arrival.

This motif is one element of the self-characterization of Tiglath-pileser, who continually tells us how he forced his way into regions previously unknown to his ancestors. It goes without saying that he claims to have triumphed over all his enemies, notwithstanding the most difficult conditions. To emphasize the importance of these achievements, it was often stated that adversaries did not stand a chance, even if they created coalitions against Tiglath-pileser.

A further innovation of Tiglath-pileser's inscriptions is that the names of the opponents' leaders were recorded systematically, with the exception of a passage about the war against the Nairi lands that lists the rulers concerned only with the title *šarru*, "king," followed by their respective dominion. The report concerning this conflict is of particular interest regarding the political structure of that region. Similar to the situation of Katmuḫu, the term "Nairi lands" stands for a coalition of independent kinglets who joined together in defense but pursued their own agendas otherwise. For quite a while, their realm had an unusual attraction for Assyrian kings, not least because of their knowledge of horse breeding. Tiglath-pileser did not cover up the fact that he fought a war of aggression against the Nairi lands that combined the effect of

deterrence with the goal of acquiring a reasonable supply of horses for the Assyrian army. The tribute required from Nairi included not only 2,000 sheep and goats but also 1,200 horses per year.

The prism inscription RIMA 1, A.0.87.1, which covers the activities of the first five years of his reign, gives real insight into Tiglath-pileser's concept of kingship. The young king was attempting to teach all of the lands that had been subordinated to Assyria in the past but lost in times of distress, to respect him. Moreover, he was trying to establish new boundaries beyond the former Assyrian territory. The regions attacked by Tiglath-pileser's armies spanned from northeastern Syria and the Zagros Mountains all the way to the lands southeast of the Lower Zab, in the border area to Babylonia: "Altogether, I conquered 42 lands and their rulers from the other side of the Lower Zab in distant mountainous regions to the other side of the Euphrates River, people of Ḫatti, and the Upper Sea in the west – from my accession year to my fifth regnal year. I subdued them to one authority, took hostages from them, (and) imposed upon them tribute and impost" (vi 39–48). This practice of taking hostages from among defeated enemies was not new. Already at the end of the 13th century BCE, during the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I, hostages from the land of (U)qumanu are mentioned. Likewise, the captured Babylonian king Kaštiliaš – according to the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic – was not deported alone, but with any other family members who could be found. But Tiglath-pileser was the first Assyrian king to refer to hostages, especially the children of defeated adversaries, as an instrument of politics in official inscriptions.

It was also new that punitive measures against defeated opponents were described in detail. We thus learn that a city within the realm of the kings of Qumanu was spared under the condition that the inhabitants destroyed all of the fortifications down to their foundations. In addition, 300 families with members who participated in the rebellion against Assyria were forced into exile (Frahm 2009: 28).

The military successes of his first regnal years required a powerful army. To what extent Tiglath-pileser may have adopted strategies from his father cannot be estimated with certainty. It is also conceivable that he realized ideas he had developed while serving as crown prince. His affinity for chariotry, at any rate, is striking. Chariotry's development, partly supported with captured resources, is discussed in the context of extending boundary-lines and increasing the Assyrian population and its welfare: "I had in harness for the forces of my land more chariots and teams of horses than ever before. To Assyria I added land and to its people I added people. I brought contentment to my people (and) provided them with a secure abode" (vii 28–35).

Elsewhere in the text, the charioteers receive a prominent place as a branch of the military as well. Only where mountains were too rough did the king go without his chariot, handing it over to his soldiers to carry and leading his army on foot. Chariots were also used by the enemies of the Assyrians, and

consequently, great importance was attached to chariotry when the conflict with Babylonia intensified in the final years of Tiglath-pileser's reign.

In two separate years, a battle array of chariots was drawn up against the Babylonian king Marduk-nadin-aḫḫe. In addition, the Assyrian army successfully attacked several cities and royal palaces in Babylonia. Our sources provide different accounts of the events. The "Synchronistic History" opens with the mention of chariot battles on the Lower Zab and near Gurmarritu, "which is upstream from Akkad," continues with the conquest of Dur-Kurigalzu, Sippar, and Babylon, and ends with the plunder of the region stretching from Ugar-Sallu to Lubdi and a claim that the Assyrian kings controlled the Middle Euphrates River region up to the city of Rapiqu (Grayson 1975: 165). In a royal report from the eponym year of Taklak-ana-Aššur, the chariot battles are dated to the two consecutive (cf. Freydank 1991: 78–9) eponym years of Aššur-šuma-erīš and Ninu'ayu, but are otherwise placed at the end of the narrative. During the first expedition to Babylonia, one part of the Assyrian army initially ran a military campaign east of the Lower Zab via Lubdi to the region northwards of the Diyala River, while other contingents of troops advanced in Suḫu along the Euphrates River against Babylonian border fortresses.

The "Synchronistic History" notes in remarkable detail that all Assyrian chariots available in the Lower Zab area were involved in battle (Grayson 1975, 164). In the inscription RIMA 2, A.0.87.10:36, the starting point of the campaign, the city of Turšan, is explicitly mentioned (cf. Llop 2003a: 207).

A second expedition took place at the behest of the god Ninurta. It ended with the conquest of the cities also mentioned in the "Synchronistic History" and with the looting of the royal palaces of Babylon. While the first campaign appears to be comprehensible within the scope of the Assyrian expansion policy, the second campaign seems rather like a brutal raid, mainly focused on destruction and disorder. Perhaps the violent deaths of two princes, for which Babylonia was blamed, were the actual reasons for a hasty revenge campaign (Llop 2003b: 206ff.).

It seems that Tiglath-pileser could not possibly have hoped to impose Assyrian supremacy on its southern neighbor. In the previous years, all available funds were needed for the fight against Aramaean tribes in the western part of the state. The success of these actions was apparently very limited, as suggested by several lists of provincial centers from the administration of the "regular offerings" (*ginā'u*) to the god Assur. It may be deduced from these documents that important parts of Assyrian territories, especially in Ḫanigalbat in the west, were lost during Tiglath-pileser's final years. Consequently, the propaganda feats on which he prided himself were not of long-lasting value. No other Assyrian king before him had ever conducted a campaign to the Levant or received tribute in Arwad, Sidon, and Byblos (RIMA 2, A.0.87.4:24–30), and no earlier royal inscription mentions

the crossing of the Euphrates River (RIMA 2, A:0.87.4:34–6).

Since the king claims that such crossings took place annually, totalling twenty-eight times, and were aimed at pursuing the Ahlamû nomads, it is obvious that these non-sedentary groups, who were living, according to Tiglath-pileser's report, from Amurru and Suḫu in the Middle Euphrates River region to the Babylonian border fortress Rapiqu, posed a permanent risk to the entire western region of Assyria and were nearly impossible to control.

In the course of Tiglath-pileser's thirty-nine-year-long reign, many parallels to the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I can be observed. On the one hand, the king succeeded in strengthening the position of Assyria in the international community, leading Assyrian sovereignty in a new direction, on the other hand, he allowed himself to be drawn into long-term conflicts.

At the height of the gradually escalating crisis, the city of Babylon was looted, but this action was motivated by personal feelings of vengeance rather than by political considerations. Resources were tied up that were needed in the west to secure the borders. Assyria suffered from "imperial overstretch" and moved more and more into a defensive position, responding only to current threats at the regional level instead of developing a sustainable strategy.

Tiglath-pileser's son and successor Ašared-apil-Ekur (1075–1074 BCE) was unable to change this situation during his short reign. It was left to his brother Aššur-bel-kala (1073–1056 BCE) to recreate the ancient splendor of Assyria, albeit only for a short period of time.

Aššur-bel-kala's annals have come down to us in several fairly fragmentary copies, so it is still impossible to reconstruct a definitive chronology of events. But the stylistic resemblance to the inscriptions of his father is unmistakable. This can be seen in his report on the military campaign of his accession year, which led into the mountainous regions northeast of the Assyrian heartland. There, the path was so difficult that the king was forced to hack out a passage for his chariots with bronze pickaxes in order to reach the entry of the land Uruaṭri (RIMA 2, A.0.89.2: i 8'–18'). A very similar passage can be found in Tiglath-pileser's report on his first campaign against Katmuḫu. Along the same lines are Aššur-bel-kala's remarks concerning gifts from Egypt, including a female ape and a crocodile, which were received by the king during a campaign to the Levant (RIMA 2, A.0.89.6:4'–5'). Tiglath-pileser claims to have received such gifts from Egypt as well (Frahm 2009: 29–31).

Generally speaking, the many parallels can be explained by the fact that the political objectives had not changed since Tiglath-pileser's time. It was mainly the Aramaeans who deserved special attention. An essential part of the so-called "Broken Obelisk," the most extensive inscription of Aššur-bel-kala found so far, is dedicated to the war against the nomadic tribes. On the basis of the report on military activities around the eponym year of Aššur-rem-

nišešu, we can roughly define the area inhabited by the Aramaeans and deduce the danger posed to the Assyrian power by this threat.

The earliest campaign can be dated to the fourth month (Dumuzi) of the year preceding Aššur-rem-nišešu's eponymate. But only a few months later, in the month of Kislev (ix), when the Assyrian soldiers reached the city of Carchemish crossing the Euphrates River with rafts made of inflated goatskins, can the area of operations be specified.

By the beginning of the eponym year of Aššur-rem-nišešu, the conflict had shifted eastwards into Mušri and up to the Kašijari Mountains (Ṭūr 'Abdīn). Three months later, the army of Aššur-bel-kala also fought against the Aramaeans south of this location, finally intervening in the district of Ḫarran in the month of Araḥsamna (viii). The report of the Assyrian king simply notes that a combat took place. This is a clear indication that no decisive victories were won. In fact, the geographical range of the place names where the respective battles took place suggests that the Aramaeans managed to impose their tactics on the adversary: they avoided open battle and restricted themselves to entangling the Assyrians in numerous minor skirmishes. Thus, the Assyrians could not take advantage of the possible technical superiority of their military equipment.

Encounters took place in constantly varying locations. The Assyrian army, pursuing the nomad warriors, was forced to respond to the attacks by the Aramaean troops rather than to act according to a specific strategy. In the eponymate of Ili-iddina (which may have followed that of Aššur-rem-nišešu), the Assyrian troops again repeatedly encountered Aramaean warriors. In the month of Kislev (ix) the two sides first confronted each other at Makrisa in the Middle Khabur area, then further south, near the city of Dur-Katlimmu in the Lower Khabur region (RIMA 2, A.0.89.7: iii 20b–22).

The Aramaeans were not the only adversaries in the west of the Assyrian heartland. From his accession year to his third regnal year, Aššur-bel-kala waged two campaigns against a certain Tukulti-Mer, king of the Land of Mari (RIMA 2, A.0.89.1:14'–16'; A.0.89.2: ii 5'–11'; Frahm 2009: 41, l. 6'–12'). All in all, the enduring military conflicts with the Aramaean tribes left nobody victorious. The king's references to Assyrian triumphs over them from the Babylonian frontier at Rapiqu to Suḫu, Tadmār, and the Lebanon say more about the vast areas now threatened by the Aramaeans than about the sustainable successes of the Assyrian military. In this sense, Aššur-bel-kala could not decisively surpass his father.

Like Tiglath-pileser's inscriptions Aššur-bel-kala's include accounts of royal hunts for wild animals (RIMA 2, A.0.87.1: vii 4–12). They are imbedded in lists of countries and lands through which Aššur-bel-kala marched during his campaigns. He geographically equated his hunting ground with the entire territory under his rule: from Lebanon in the west to the Ḫamrin Mountain

(Ebeḥ) in the east (RIMA 2, A.0.89.7: iv 1–34a).

Aššur-bel-kala's Babylonian policy differed from that of his father. First, while Marduk-nadin-aḥḥe of Babylon was still alive, the old conflict remained unresolved, as is proved by a confrontation in the vicinity of Dur-Kurigalzu during which the provincial governor Kadašman-Buriaš was defeated and captured by the Assyrian army (RIMA 2, A.0.89.7: iii 4b–8b). Although the city of Babylon itself is mentioned elsewhere in the text as a target of military activities (iv 38), the passage in question is of a very general character and contains no references to concrete operations. Perhaps it was merely an exercise in martial rhetoric. Aššur-bel-kala was aware of how exhausting the confrontation of Tiglath-pileser with Babylonia was and of how the political stability of the realm was diminished by the end. In the long run, his Babylonian policy aimed at a compromise with Assyria's southern neighbor. This was impossible during the lifetime of Marduk-nadin-aḥḥe, perhaps because the latter had witnessed the looting of Babylon in the reign of Tiglath-pileser and was thus not interested in an agreement with Assyria. But when Marduk-šapik-zeri ascended the Babylonian throne, the situation began to change. The "Synchronistic History" states that Aššur-bel-kala reached a political agreement with the new king through diplomatic channels. After the latter's death, he even managed to install a certain Adad-apla-iddina, who clearly did not belong to the ruling family, as king (Grayson 1975: 165:31'–32'). That Adad-apla-iddina's daughter married the Assyrian king brings to mind the era of Aššur-uballiṭ I. Just as in the 14th century BCE, the people of Assyria and Babylonia were "joined together" (Grayson 1975: 165:36'f.), which implies, according to the Assyrian reading, no less than a claim to an indivisible supremacy in Mesopotamia. After successful campaigns from Babylon to the Mediterranean in the west, and Lake Van in the northeast, Aššur-bel-kala saw himself as the "lord of all" (RIMA 2. A.0.89.4:14; A.0.89.7: iv 34b–9).

But Aššur-bel-kala's apparent successes stood on extremely shaky foundations. It is known for certain that his son, Eriba-Adad II (1055–1054 BCE), as well as his immediate successors, were no longer able to save what had been achieved in the past. Eriba-Adad II's reign marks the beginning of a long period of decline, coming to an end only in the mid-tenth century BCE.

Concluding Remarks

The era of Aššur-uballiṭ, who was the first ruler of Ashur to use the royal title *šarru* "king" since the days of Samsi-Addu, was regarded as the true moment of the birth of "Assyria" by later generations. Aššur-uballiṭ confidently claimed admission as a Great King into the "Club of Brothers," i. e. the great powers of his time. These rulers were ideologically wedded to the idea of

territorial expansion: a Great King had to move the borders of his realm into the barbaric world outside of his kingdom, so that it would ideally comprise the whole world. Political realism, on the other hand, led to the conclusion that such an aim could not be realized. Instead, it was imperative to cooperate with the other major powers through diplomatic channels, such as conventions and treaties. This also explains the Babylonian policy of Aššur-uballiṭ. He avoided any showdowns with his adversary of equal rank, searching instead for diplomatic solutions, whereas smaller and militarily inferior states in Assyria's neighborhood were made tributary states.

The Assyrian kings hoped that Assur and the "great gods" would look favorably upon them. To quote Shalmaneser I: "Assur, the lord, faithfully chose me to worship him, gave me the sceptre, weapon, and staff to (rule) the blackheaded people, and granted me the true crown of lordship" (RIMA 1, A.0.77.1:22–6). Ideologically, the Assyrian kings, however powerful they were, depended on the gods. They were the ones who ordered kings to conduct campaigns against the enemies of Assyria and to widen the borders of the land of Ashur (RIMA 2, A.0.87.1: i 46–9). By their favor, the king was enabled to make the right decisions (RIMA 1, A.0.78.1: i 32–3). In battle, the gods stood beside him (RIMA 2, A.0.89.2: i 9'–10').

Due to Assyria's lack of natural boundaries, its rulers considered it desirable to establish a glacis around the Assyrian heartland, mainly against the inhabitants of the mountain regions that encircled Assyria from the northwest to the northeast (usually, these people put the assertiveness of a king to the test just after his accession to the throne). Expansion in the west held the promise of free access to resources, arable land, and trading routes. If nothing else, prestige was a strong stimulus to try to establish the border of the Assyrian state on the eastern bank of the Euphrates River. Tukulti-Ninurta I was the first king to claim that he achieved this goal. But it was not until the reign of Tiglath-pileser I that Assyrian armies crossed the Euphrates River and moved on to the Mediterranean Sea.

In terms of power politics, it seems to have been likewise of fundamental importance to gain control over the Eastern Tigris region. That there are only rather sporadic and laconic references to this in royal inscriptions is not all that surprising if we consider the many setbacks the Assyrian military experienced there in the period under study. Defeats in battle were part of the day-to-day political life, but it was not appropriate to admit to them in the reports of royal deeds, which were addressed to posterity. Already in the 14th century BCE, efforts to rule the Eastern Tigris River region led to a conflict of interests with Babylonia. On several occasions during the time of Tukulti-Ninurta I and Tiglath-pileser I, Assyria succeeded in gaining an advantage and dominating its rival in the south, at least for a while. As soon as Assyrian pressure diminished, however, the Babylonians renewed their claim to districts east of the Tigris River, doing everything they could to prevail. In the

end, a stalemate was reached. Neither Assyria nor Babylonia was able to vanquish its rival. They wore each other down and wasted resources that were, realistically, needed elsewhere. Only long after the Middle Assyrian period could Assyria regain its political power and, after incorporating the region east of the Lower Zab, Babylonia, and many other territories, evolve into a true empire.

Abbreviations

KAR=

E. Ebeling, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts*, 2 volumes, Leipzig: 1915–23.

MARV=

H. Freydank et al., *Mittellassyrische Rechtsurkunden und Verwaltungstexte*, Berlin, Saarbrücken 1976–.

RIMA=

A. K. Grayson, *The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Assyrian Periods*, 3 volumes, Toronto: Toronto University Press 1987–96.

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Further Reading

A comprehensive up-to-date overview of the history of the Middle Assyrian period is currently not available; for short overviews see Cancik-Kirschbaum 2003 and Postgate 2011. For a number of important recent articles on the political situation of the Middle Assyria state in the western part of the realm, see Düring 2015, for the situation in the eastern Tigris region and chronological problems of Middle Assyrian history, see Miglus and Mühl 2011. Brown 2013 provides a study of the structure of the Middle Assyrian state and how it eventually contributed to its decline (see also Cancik-Kirschbaum 2014). Abraham 2001 deals with a number of economic and social aspects of Middle Assyrian history.

CHAPTER 7

Economy, Society, and Daily Life in the Middle Assyrian Period

Stefan Jakob

The Middle Assyrian State

In the days of the Old Assyrian city-state, the ruler's power was limited by political bodies of various types, namely, the City Assembly and the City Hall (Dercksen 2004: 5ff.). A decisive change occurred when the Amorite Samsî-Addu/Šamši-Adad conquered the city of Ashur and made it a part of his Upper Mesopotamian Kingdom (Charpin and Durand 1997). This political entity did not last but left its mark. In the following period, there were attempts to return to ancient local traditions. A certain Puzur-Sîn prided himself on having “destroyed the evil of Asinum, offspring of Šamši-[Adad] ... not of the flesh of [the city] Ashur” (RIMA 1, A.0.40.1001). Puzur-Sîn was ignored by later tradition, especially the Assyrian King List (see, however, the discussion in [Chapter 5](#)). But the Middle Assyrian state was nonetheless characterized by features that were derived from both the traditional values Puzur-Sîn had sought to promote and the proto-imperial concept of an Upper Mesopotamian kingdom.

The King

The king as warrior

Although traditional titles like “vice-regent of the god Assur” (*iššiak* ^dAššur) or “overseer” (*uklu*) are attested in their royal inscriptions and decrees, the kings of the Middle Assyrian period had little in common with their Old Assyrian predecessors. There was no longer a City Assembly limiting the ruler's power. The City Hall still survived, but served only as the place where standard weighing stones were kept (Faist 2010: 17).

Along with the growth of their military power, Assyrian kings began to use an increasingly sophisticated system of royal titles. Aššur-uballiṭ I (1353-1318 BCE) was the first to call himself “king of the land of Ashur” (*šar māt Aššur*;

RIMA 1, A.0.73.6). Several years later, his grandson Arik-den-ili (1307–1296 BCE) introduced the epithet “strong king” (*šarru dannu*; RIMA 1, A.0.75.1:2).

Not surprisingly, this development accelerated during the 13th century BCE. Adad-nirari I (1295–1264 BCE) already needed thirty-two lines to present the list of his titles, including, inter alia, the general *rubā'u ellu* “holy prince,” *šakanki ilāni* “appointee of the gods,” as well as more specific titles such as *nêr dapnūti ummān kašši qutû lullumû u šubarî* “defeater of the aggressive armies of the Kassites, Qutû Lullumu, and Šubaru” (see RIMA 1, A.0.76.1:1–4). Adad-nirari introduces himself in this way in his building inscriptions, giving his genealogy, his individual achievements, and also, indirectly, the outlines of a political program: the supremacy over northern Mesopotamia, the fight against the enemies of the god Assur, especially against the Babylonians, and the extension of borders and boundaries.

This development continued during the reign of Adad-nirari's son, Shalmaneser I (1263–1234 BCE), and reached its first peak after the accession of Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233–1197 BCE). The royal inscriptions of his time illustrate how the epithets were highly dependent upon the current political situation (see Cifola 2004: 8). The description of Tukulti-Ninurta's military exploits from the first decade of his reign begins with a rather general epithet section (Streck 2007: 146f.). During the crisis years after the victory over the Kassite king Kaštiliaš IV, characterized by the fall of the puppet king Enlil-nadin-šumi, neither the Babylonian campaign nor the capture of his former adversary are mentioned. After regaining control over the south with the enthronement of Aššur-šuma-iddina, we observe an increase of royal titles again, especially in a building inscription on a stone tablet from the foundation deposit of the ziggurat in Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta (RIMA 1, A.0.78.23). Interestingly, there is another (very similar) inscription from a higher level of the same building (RIMA 1, A.0.78.24). It has, in addition, the epithets “king of the Land of Ashur and the Land of Karduniaš,” “king of Sumer and Akkad,” “king of Tilmun and Meluhḥa,” and “king of the Upper and the Lower Seas,” besides “king of all people ... ruler of rulers ... king of kings” (see also IM 76787; Deller, Fadhil, and Ahmad 1994: 464ff.). Clearly, the first version was replaced by a second in order to bear witness to the glorious victories the king had achieved in the meantime.

In Middle Assyrian royal inscriptions, only successful achievements were recorded, while defeats and other misfortunes were omitted or, at least, disguised. Therefore, the long period of decline after the assassination of Tukulti-Ninurta in 1197 BCE remains widely undocumented in our sources.

Another form in which Middle Assyrian kings celebrated their deeds in battle was the epic. The most impressive example is the “Tukulti-Ninurta Epic” (written after the ruler's victory over Kaštiliaš IV, most likely in the year 1220 BCE, see Foster 2005: 298ff.), but there are forerunners from the time of

The king as priest

The earliest evidence for the use of the title *šangû*, “priest,” by an Assyrian king comes from an inscription of Adad-nirari I (RIMA 1, A.0.76.1:18), who called himself *šangû šīru ša Enlil* (“the exalted priest of the god Enlil”). The Middle Assyrian coronation ritual (which dates to a period no earlier than the foundation of the royal residence Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta around 1230 BCE) indicates that the king’s priestly functions were closely linked to the supreme god Assur: *ina maḥar Aššur ilika šangûtkā u šangûta ša mārēka lū ṭābat*, “before Assur may your priesthood and the priesthood of your sons be pleasant!” (KAR 135 ii 10f.; Müller 1937: 12f.). Other sources emphasize as well the closeness of the Assyrian king to the god Assur and his role as the intermediary between god and mankind.

It comes, therefore, as no surprise that the feeding of the god, symbolized by the so-called “regular offering” (*ginā’u*), was of great importance for the relationship between the god Assur, the ruler, and the people of the land of Ashur. The religious duties of the king, however, included the provision to care for all of the gods. Shalmaneser I calls himself the *mubbib šuluḥḥī u nindabē mušātir ana napḥar ilāne zībi taklīme*, “the one who keeps rituals and offerings pure, the one who makes abundant the presentation offerings for all of the gods” (RIMA 1, A.0.77.1:3–5). While his son and successor Tukulti-Ninurta used very similar epithets, the tone shifted slightly after the reign of Aššur-reša-iši. From that point onwards, the epithet section of royal inscriptions emphasized the martial qualities of the respective ruler. The care for sanctuaries and ritual duties are mentioned, rather, in the context of accounts of royal temple building.

The king as good shepherd

The fulfillment of the king’s duties to the gods, such as were expected from the king, would ensure the prosperity and welfare of the land and its people. The Assyrian rulers attached great importance to their role as guardians of their subjects. From the reign of Adad-nirari I onward (Seux 1967: 247), they often called themselves “shepherds.” Shalmaneser I referred to himself as *rē’û puḥur dadmē*, “shepherd of all the settlements” (RIMA 1, A.0.77.1:7f.), and Tukulti-Ninurta I boasted that “Assur ... gave me the scepter for my office of shepherd (and presented) me in addition the staff for my office of herdsman” (A.0.78.1 i 21–4). Later, he claimed to be in charge of the entire world, saying that he “shepherded the four quarters behind Šamaš” (Deller, Fadhil, and

Ahmad 1994: 460f.). From here, it was only a small step for Tukulti-Ninurta to identify himself with the sun god directly, in the title ^d*Šamšu kiššat nišē*, “Sun(god) of all people” (Cifola 2004: 8).

The king as builder

In Middle Assyrian royal inscriptions, special attention was paid not only to glorious deeds on the battlefield, but to public works as well. The building and reconstruction of temples were the primary concern, but the king’s palace (*ekallu*), as a prestigious symbol of kingship, did not remain unmentioned. The Assyrian rulers made considerable efforts to provide proper care and maintenance of public buildings. After all, such deeds would certainly be more lasting than military successes. Consequently, special emphasis was placed on foundation deposits that documented royal achievements in this area. A later ruler who would find earlier building reports in these deposits as he was undertaking his own construction work was thus encouraged to honor his predecessors’ memory. Correspondingly, in case of the removal or the obliteration of the original builder’s name, the violator was cursed. Tukulti-Ninurta I, for instance, states at the end of an inscription relating to construction work in his new residence: “He who destroys that wall, discards my monumental inscriptions and my inscribed name, abandons Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta, my capital, and neglects (it): may the god Assur, my lord, overthrow his sovereignty, smash his weapons, bring about the defeat of his army, diminish his borders, decree the end of his reign, darken his days, vitiate his years (and) destroy his name and his seed from the land” (RIMA 1, A.0.78.22:59–67).

The king as judge

Compared to the situation during the Old Assyrian period, the Middle Assyrian king was apparently less concerned with his role as a judge. Although he was likely the supreme judicial authority and could be appealed to directly in certain cases (for example, adultery, theft of booty, or sorcery), judicial functions were usually performed by royal officials. Professional “judges” (*da*” *ānu*) are, however, attested only rarely in the textual record (Jakob 2003: 20f.; 183ff.).

The king’s servants

At the king’s side, there was a sophisticated bureaucracy, whose fields of

responsibility were, however, not sharply outlined. The ruler could intervene at any time and at any level, either personally or through an intermediary, either by command (*ina abat šarre*), by decree (*riksu*), or by royal representatives (*qēpūtu ša šarre*).

The representatives were trusted men recruited, to a large extent, from the group of officials called *ša rēši* (see below, “The Royal Palace”). With their help, the king maintained contact with various institutions all over the Assyrian territory. The main task of the administration, especially in the provinces, was to register the crop yield of state-owned fields under cultivation and the stocks of animal husbandry. In and around the capital, administrators were also concerned with the registration of men and goods (e.g., prisoners of war, deportees, levies, or tribute), the allocation of royal gifts (*rīmuttu*), long-distance trade, and the certification of private sales of land (Jakob 2003: 270–81).

High-ranking officials had their own *qēpu* representatives, who acted on their behalf. Of particular note is a certain Babu-aḥa-iddina, who was a powerful official, presumably a vizier, at the royal court during the second half of the 13th century BCE. The archive from his private quarters in the city of Ashur (Freydank and Saporetti 1989; Pedersén 1985: 106–13) provides us with rich information about his economic activities and his relationship with the court. Babu-aḥa-iddina’s *qēpūtu* were instructed to check and inventory the stocks of his storehouses in several cities. Furthermore, they supervised the servants and workers of the household and served as messengers. In the absence of their master, they were allowed to write to the superintendent of Babu-aḥa-iddina’s house in the latter’s name (Jakob 2003: 282–6). Altogether, we get the impression that Babu-aḥa-iddina’s household was a smaller-scale version of the royal household.

The royal *qēpu* officials were responsible for the registration of administrative processes, but, as a rule, they did not write themselves. This task was delegated to a professional scribe (*ṭupšarru*), often mentioned in the documents in question after the *qēpūtu*.

The durability of clay as a writing material meant that a large number of administrative tablets have survived. But it must be assumed that a considerable part of administrative procedures were actually documented on wooden writing-boards (*lē’u*) with wax surfaces (Postgate 2007: 371–4). They were demonstrably used for lists of personnel and also for the daily administration of commodities, which required a constant addition or removal of entries. This can be deduced, for example, from a document which records the transfer of information about sheepskins that were accrued in various temples during a period of two years from “the writing-boards of the offerings” to a clay tablet (Jakob 2003: 377).

Certainly there was a group of counselors at the king’s court to advise him on

the politics of the day, even though we have no evidence that any Middle Assyrian king had a “cabinet” of the highest officials, as it has been suggested for the Neo-Assyrian Empire (Parpola 1995; see also Faist 2010: 24). Among these counselors, the “vizier” (*sukkallu*) seems to have played a particularly important role. As soon as relevant sources become available, we see Assyrian viziers concerned with diplomatic matters, as was the case in the 14th century BCE in the kingdom of Arrapha (Jakob 2003: 57ff.).

In the second half of the 13th century BCE, at the latest, after the conquest of Ḫanigalbat, the position of a “grand vizier” (*sukkallu rabi’u*) was created, superior to the ordinary viziers. The “grand vizier” was also called the “king of Ḫanigalbat” (a title that survived at least until the first half of the 12th century BCE), in reference to his administrative tasks in the western part of the Assyrian realm. Here, the grand vizier was the highest official, comprehensively dealing with the supervision of the territorial administration. Several subordinate viziers stood ready to act upon his instructions. They kept in constant touch with him through letters and were involved in border patrols and enemy defenses as well as in economic matters (agriculture, irrigation, food storage and distribution). It is probable that the “grand viziers” had their residence in an important local center. A possible candidate is the city of Aššukanni in northeastern Syria (Jakob 2009: 45f.).

Obviously, the tasks of the grand vizier went far beyond the consolidation of Assyrian authority in the western territories, as may be demonstrated by the events surrounding a siege of Lubdi during the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I. The city was situated in the Eastern Tigris River region, far from Ḫanigalbat. Nevertheless, the grand vizier had to be kept informed about the fate of the besieged town and its inhabitants, as well as about any military activities in that area (Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996: 158f.).

From its first attestation around the accession of Tukulti-Ninurta I, the holders of the office of grand vizier were members of a certain branch of the royal family. The title was passed down from father to son. That sons followed their father can be observed in the case of other high offices as well, but not consistently. The administrative notice MARV VIII 59, for example, reveals that a certain Aššur-našir was acting as the highest official in the administration for deliveries of the “regular offering” *ginā’u* in the Assur sanctuary at the time of writing, like his father Ezbu-lešir before him (Jakob 2003: 175f.). On the other hand, there are many cases in which the succession was settled differently, without taking into account possible heirs.

The Royal Palace

A symbol of royal power, the palace (*ekallu*) was the center of the land’s

government. The king had palaces in several locations at his disposal. As shown *inter alia* by the so-called Middle Assyrian Palace decrees (Roth 1995: 195–209), the king's court did not always stay in the main palace in Ashur, but often traveled, as we may presume, from one residence to the other (see MARV III 1).

The Palace decrees were compiled during the eponym year of Sîn-apla-iddina, which means either in the third decade of the reign of Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 BCE) or in the time of his immediate successors (Freydank 1991: 89), and contain a large collection of regulations relating to the palace personnel, in particular to the women in the vicinity of the Assyrian king. The regulations differentiate between the “wife of the king” (*aššat šarre*) and a group of “palace women” (*sinniltu ša ekalle*), who seem to have been of lower rank, i.e. ordinary “harem” women.

Daily life inside the palace followed strict rules. Aside from the “provincial governor” (*bēl pāḥete*), mentioned in the first decree by Aššur-uballiṣ I, there was a range of office holders who were closely linked to the royal court. These include the “palace administrator” (*rab ekalle*), the “palace herald” (*nāgir ekalle*), the “chief supervisor” (*rab zāriqē*), and the “physician of the Inner Quarters” (*asû ša bētānu*). These men formed a council whose task it was to supervise the activities and the conduct of court attendants (Jakob 2003: 67, 75f., 80ff.). Two different types of personnel were distinguished: *ša rēši* and *manzaz pāni*. In particular the status of the *ša rēši* officials is still a matter of dispute. While most scholars believe that they were eunuchs (see *ibid.*: 82–92), others tend to interpret the problematic textual evidence in a different way (Dalley 2001; see also Siddall 2007).

The individual decrees dealt with general rules for daily life within the community of courtiers and harem women. Attention was given, on the one hand, to admission requirements for male personnel regarding their suitability or their access to the harem. On the other hand, the proper behavior of palace women was specified: their relationship to the king within the inner palace as well as away on travel, dispute resolution, or the custody of their property. Aside from these women, there were other women working in the palace who were married to men from outside of the palace.

The king Ninurta-apil-Ekur (1191–1179 BCE) issued a particularly large number of decrees. This probably reflects his attempt to impose law and order in Assyria again after a period that was politically complicated. In this context, it may be of interest to observe that one regulation provides that a palace woman shall be mutilated if she has cursed a descendant of the late Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233–1197 BCE), whose last direct descendant, Enlil-kudurri-ušur, was overthrown by Ninurta-apil-Ekur.

From an economic point of view, the “palace” represented the main institution of the Middle Assyrian state, comparable to a very large household (Faist

2001: 80ff.). The designation of income and expenditure within the royal administration as “belonging to the palace” (*ša ekalle*) has to be understood in this sense (Jakob 2003: 25, fn. 184). The chief administrator of the royal palace was the “steward” (*mašennu*), who was known from the second half of the 12th century BCE onward as the *mašennu rabi’u* (to distinguish him from office holders in smaller administrative units or in private households). His area of operations comprised large storage facilities. Here, raw materials were given to craftsmen (including bow makers, leather workers, smiths, and perfume makers) to manufacture products “just-in-time” (ibid.: 100–8). The written agreement between the administration of the storehouse and the individual expert was concluded in the form of a work contract. First, the materials were listed in terms of quality and quantity with the mention of the palace as owner of the goods. After the name(s) of the craftsmen who had received these materials, the desired product was specified. The contract concludes with the so-called *ṭuppušu iḥappi* clause that meant that the tablet was to be broken after fulfillment (Jakob 2009: 22).

The organization of long-distance trade belonged to the tasks of the *mašennu* as well. There were both Assyrian and foreign merchants who were engaged on a commercial basis for this purpose. As we learn from administrative documents, they provided the “palace” not only with luxury goods (perfume, precious oil and textiles, wooden objects, and jewelry), but also with metals, animals (horses, donkeys, cattle, sheep and goats), and animal skins (see Faist 2001: 53–76). Conversely, Assyria’s export goods were textiles, metals (bronze, silver, and tin), and slaves.

Based on the model of the capital’s palace there were royal residences in other Assyrian cities or rural estates all over the realm. The king and his entourage could rest comfortably at these places while traveling over land. The administrative centers in provincial capitals were organized in the same way as in Ashur. The official residence, where the head of the local administration was situated, was part of the “palace,” without necessarily being a monumental building – the term “palace” had become synonymous with Assyrian state power.

The Administrative Structure of the Middle Assyrian Kingdom

Provincial government

The administration of the “land of Ashur” was headed by the king, who acted as the intermediary between gods and men. All of the offices were, at least in

theory, responsible toward the king. There are some hints of a swearing-in process for the royal officials within the so-called “coronation ritual” (Müller 1937: 14f.). However, whether it was a one-time act on the occasion of the king’s accession to the throne or, rather, was performed periodically (once a year, for instance), is still contested.

The territory of Assyria proper was divided into smaller units usually referred to as a *pāḫutu* “district” (or “province”), first mentioned in an edict of Aššur-uballiṣ I with regard to the city of Ashur (Roth 1995: 197). From sources from the 13th century BCE, we also know the comparable term *ḫalṣu* “fortress, fortification, district” (Postgate 2007: 243ff.), but this was only of subordinate importance and was afterwards replaced completely with *pāḫutu*.

Moreover, there were some areas within the Assyrian realm that were subject to the Crown but outside of the *pāḫutu* framework in certain ways. A prominent example of this has come from recent excavations in Tell Ṭaban, ancient Ṭabetu, on the eastern bank of the Khabur River. Sources are available from the first decade of the reign of Shalmaneser I (eponymate of Aššur-nadin-šumate; see Bloch 2008: 146) until the beginning of the 11th century BCE (Shibata 2009: 106; Maul 2005: 17). According to both administrative documents and monumental inscriptions, there was a local dynasty of rulers in Ṭabetu who called themselves “kings of the land Mari” (see Shibata 2012: 491–3).

Another local kingdom is known from the annals of Aššur-bel-kala (1073–1056 BCE), which mention a certain Tukulti-Mer, “king of the land Mari” (or “the land of Ḫana”). After his father, Ilu-iqiša, likewise known as “king of the land of Ḫana,” had apparently been subordinated to the Assyrian monarch, Tukulti-Mer strove for autonomy. But an Assyrian attack had a fatal impact on his area of control. Aššur-bel-kala claims (RIMA 2, A.0.89.1:15’–16’): “By the command of the god Assur, [my lord], I marched [to the land Mari ...]. The land Mar[i ...] I uprooted their [people].”

In contrast to these “lands” of client kings, the names of genuine *pāḫutu* districts were derived from their central town (*pāḫutu ša GN*), where the office of the “district governor” (*bēl pāḫete*) was located. The district governor bore responsibility for the economy, the public safety, and the order of his area. A fundamental part of his tasks pertained to the cultivation of crown land and the storage and distribution of its products. The king sent his representatives (*qēpūtu*) to the provincial capital once a year to “release the barley-heap” (*pišerti karu’e*). This meant that the royal officials registered the yield of the current season and wrote an administrative document that would be stored at the central office in the capital. In this way, the Assyrian administration was well informed about the current stocks of grain throughout the kingdom. Similarly, the representatives supervised the herdsmen and shepherds (Jakob 2003: 353–73; Röllig 2008: 5ff.).

Another important responsibility of the “district governors” was the supervision of the local labor force, i.e. farm workers and craftsmen. The governors had to coordinate their activities and to secure their living with rations. In cases of need (i.e. if the stocks were not sufficient for supply), they were instructed to inform higher officials in order to get support from elsewhere. Conversely, they were required to provide help for other districts or for special occasions on request, for which they were compensated (Jakob 2009: 59–68).

Among the duties and taxes of a district, the delivery of the regular offering (*ginā’u*) to the god Assur, represented by the *rab ginā’e* official in the capital, stands out. In this way, the affiliation of an administrative unit with the “land of Ashur” (*māt Aššur*) was expressed. The provinces of the kingdom had to provide barley, sesame, fruits, and syrup to feed the god (Postgate 1992: 204; cf. Holloway 2002: 100f.). The amount of offerings demanded by the crown was rather small, and was mainly symbolic. Negligence regarding the offerings could, nonetheless, be understood as a rebellion against Assur, punishable by the Assyrian king as the god’s representative on Earth. Late payers were given warnings by way of loan contracts; that is, the god himself allowed them to defer payment. Those who did not fulfill their task for several years were summoned in person.

The incoming supplies were carefully registered by the administration of the Assur sanctuary: first on the quay by specification of supplier, provenance, and commodity, and then in the form of tables at the year’s end. These texts recorded the total quantity delivered by the taxable districts during the past eponym year. Although the office of the *rab ginā’e* was an institution of the temple, the “governor of the land” (*šakin māte*) in the city of Ashur was the final authority for registering the incoming goods.

Returning to the duties of the *bēl pāḫete* in their districts, we must refer to his role as a representative of the Crown with respect to internal security and to diplomatic relationships with other countries. It is obvious from contemporary sources (see [Chapter 6](#)) that the Assyrian authority in the regions outside of the heartland was challenged constantly by enemies of various types (nomads, insubordinate inhabitants, or the former “elite” of conquered regions). Thus, the maintenance of garrisons was an important task. It can be demonstrated, especially for the western part of the realm, that lack of personnel was a substantial problem not only in the economic sector, but also in the military. Therefore the *bēl pāḫete* had to have some talent for improvisation.

Along the main roads, provincial centers were used by couriers and foreign delegates to rest. There, they were accommodated and supplied with rations. The same is true for members of the Assyrian “elite,” who were given permission to use the local facilities (see below, “The Assyrian *cursus publicus*”).

City government

At the head of the administration of a city was the “mayor” (*ḥazi’ānu*), who represented the local “elite,” even though he was appointed by the crown. Similar to the (more important) *bēl pāḥete*, he was primarily responsible for economic processes (Jakob 2003: 151–60), including the agricultural production on crown land, the organization of labor, and the supply of rations.

The *ḥazi’ānu* was also involved in property transactions. According to a legal document from Nineveh, he was present, together with the local district governor, a herald, and two scribes, when an arable field was expected to be sold. This brings to mind a passage in the Middle Assyrian Laws that deals with the sale of land in the vicinity of Ashur; there the *ḥazi’ānu* is accompanied by the local “magnates,” including a herald, a vizier, and several royal representatives.

The coordination between the cities of a district and the surrounding villages, both with respect to the agricultural sector and the workforce of the state, was handled by the “village inspector” (*rab ālāne*) who, if necessary, had to act on behalf of a higher official (ibid.: 160–6).

The Assyrian cursus publicus

The increasing extent of the Assyrian kingdom required an improvement of communication channels, which led to the establishment of rest stops along the roads. Primarily intended for the transmission of messages within the administration, the stops were used by both royal messengers and the couriers of high officials. The exact distance between stations is still not entirely clear. From contemporary letters of Assyrian officials, we know that messengers were able to cover a distance of more than thirty-five miles a day (Jakob 2003: 291f.), but this applies only to the express service, *kallû* in Assyrian. Usually, a courier could cover approximately twenty miles from dawn to dusk without haste, especially if there was an opportunity to change horses (Jakob 2009: 45f.). Between the more important road stations there must have been smaller stopping places to spend the night safely and comfortably. Depending on the density of settlements, it also cannot be excluded that travelers had to stay outdoors overnight. In this case (or maybe regularly), the Assyrian administration provided the couriers with an escort (Jakob 2003: 69f.; cf. Jakob 2009: 156 sub *ka’ulu*).

The road system also offered benefits to private individuals or messengers from other countries. This is revealed in letter orders prescribing rations for

the travelers and fodder for the animals. From these documents, we can deduce the composition of traveling groups: messengers, couriers, and delegates used chariots and mule-drawn carriages, but some of them also went by foot. A delegation could consist of anywhere from twenty people to only two to three.

When royal couriers and other Assyrian travelers were concerned, instructions to local authorities on how they should be treated were rather general in nature (“With you they shall eat, with you they shall drink. Give barley and straw (to their horses) until they will depart!”; see Jakob 2009: 57). In contrast, the provisions for foreign delegates were listed precisely: the required quantity of beer and bread, in some cases even meat, for the messenger and his entourage, besides barley for horses, donkeys, and mules. The expenses for feeding the delegates could be covered by the office of the grand vizier, on the condition that a document listing them was submitted to the responsible official within one month (ibid.: 59–69)

The Military

In Middle Assyrian textual sources, many references to military personnel, campaigns, and weapons can be found. Unfortunately, the evidence lacks sufficient clarity in most cases, and any review of this topic will be liable to be fundamentally revised in the future.

It seems obvious that there was no standing army in the true sense of the word. This can already be seen in the high command: military leaders were recruited from the officials of the royal administration, including the *sukkallu* (*rabi’u*), the *tartennu*, and the *nāgīru*, and (based on Neo-Assyrian evidence, see Mattila 2000: 45ff.) probably also the “chief cupbearer” (*rab šaqē*).

The majority of the soldiers were mobilized only in cases of necessity, i.e. an upcoming military campaign or civil projects. Servants of the crown could be recruited on the basis of legal regulations and relationships of dependence (*ilku* or *perru*; see [Figure 7.1](#)). In addition, there is some evidence of mercenaries, who were employed and remunerated for specific operations (Jakob 2009: 44; cf. Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996: 108). We do not know how and to what extent these soldiers were prepared for their respective tasks. Nevertheless, it is hard to imagine that the military successes of the Assyrian army over several decades during the 13th century BCE could have been possible without any training.

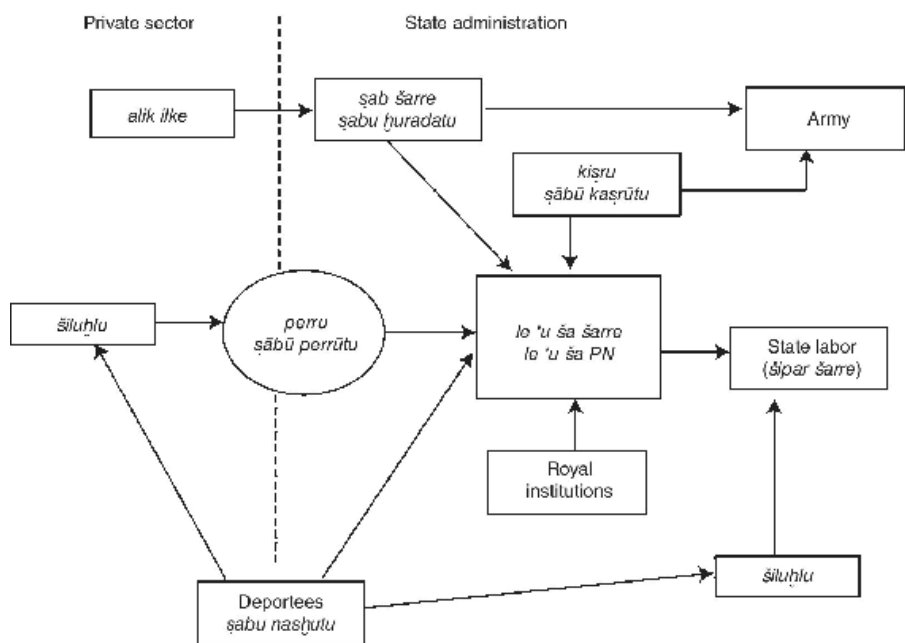


Figure 7.1 Conscription and labor organization in Middle Assyrian times.

Source: Stefan Jakob. Reproduced with permission of Brill.

In contrast to these troops, who were referred to as *ḥurādu* or *šābū ḥurādātu* (Jakob 2003: 202ff.), there is evidence to suggest the existence of more “professional” soldiers, who were referred to as *šābū kaṣrūtu* (ibid.: 196¹²). It cannot be decided for certain what exactly distinguished them from the other troops, but keeping in mind that at least some branches of the army, such as archers or charioteers, required continual training, their professional skills could have played an important role.

Large parts of the infantry probably belonged to the *ḥurādu*. The official term *šābū ša kakkē* “weapon troops,” known from administrative letters from the 13th century BCE, as well as from inscriptions of the king Aššur-bel-kala (1073–1056 BCE; see; RIMA 2, A.0.89.1:10’ and *passim*), does not specify the weapons these soldiers carried. In listings, they appear in opposition to the chariotry (BATSH 4/1, 8:38’), as do the *šābū ša arāte* “shield-bearing troops” with regard to the archers (Jakob 2003: 214ff.). It seems reasonable to assume that both terms could refer to the same branch of the army. The shield might be seen as only one component of the equipment, besides coats, swords, and lances (Postgate 2007: 289ff.).

It cannot be excluded that the *šābū ša kakkē* also comprised the “archers” (*šābū ša qalte*) and “slingers” (*šābū ša uṣpe*), who are mainly attested in ration lists from the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I (Postgate 2008: 86f.), whereas the chariotry must be considered separate. Pictorial representations of Middle Assyrian chariots suggest that their crews were composed of two men, a

driver and a bowman. This seems to correlate with the two titles *māru damqu* and *ša mugerre*, with the former most likely designating the commander of the chariot and the latter the driver (Jakob 2003: 208–11).

There is no evidence that chariotry was ever decisive in determining the outcome of a war before the reign of Tiglath-pileser I. In his royal inscriptions, he, as his son Aššur-bel-kala would do after him, put particular emphasis on the chariotry as a combat unit as well as a prestigious vehicle of the ruler. There is mention, inter alia, of two conflicts against the Babylonian king in which both parties faced each other with a battle line of chariots (RIMA 2, A.0.87.4:45–9). These events are also recorded in the “Synchronistic History” (Grayson 1975: 164). Obviously, chariotry was of particular strategic importance at this time. In comparison, horsemen (*ša petħalle*) did not play any special role as a branch of the army. In the Middle Assyrian period they served merely as couriers or as escorts; they were apparently not an important factor in battle (Jakob 2003: 212f.).

Besides the fighting troops, there were many additional occupations within the military sector; for instance, the “sappers” (*ša nēpeše*), who were particularly in demand during the siege of enemy cities, but also during public building activities (ibid.: 216). In addition, there were numerous specialists in the baggage train, including the *ša muħħi emārē* “overseer of the donkeys (which carried military equipment and booty)” (ibid.: 221f.) and various craftsmen. Other personnel worked for the administration of military bases, such as the “house of the chariots” (*bīt mugerrāte*) or the “carriage house” (*bīt utnannāte*), where, perhaps, horses and mules were kept (ibid.: 217–19).

The size of military units can be determined only in exceptional cases. In texts from the 13th century BCE, troops by the name of *šābū kašrūtu* are mentioned. It cannot be said with certainty whether or not these units, who were under the command of a *rab kašrūte*, were similar to some extent to a *kišru* in the Neo-Assyrian period, i.e. one hundred men (Fales and Postgate 1995: XXVII; differently Postgate 2007: 344). The term *rab kišri* “captain,” however, did not appear before the 12th century BCE (Jakob 2003: 196). So we can only assume that these officials were higher in rank than the “commanders of fifty” (*rab ḫanšē*), who were the chiefs of five *ešertu* groups under the command of a “commander of ten” (*rab ešerte*). This unit was the smallest one within the state administration. It ideally comprised ten people, but there could have been more or fewer workers or soldiers (ibid.: 201).

Recruitment and Labor Administration

The large-scale building activities and military campaigns undertaken on

behalf of Assyrian kings from the 13th century BCE onwards required a sophisticated system of personnel administration to provide large quantities of workers or soldiers where and when they were needed.

It has been suggested that there was a royal doctrine in Assyria according to which the palace had a claim to much of the land, including private property (Lafont 2003: 524). So, if the ruler provided his attendants with arable land from which to make their living, he demanded their service in return (Jakob 2003: 34f.). The nature and scope of employment, either military or civil, was determined by the royal administration. In the event of death or breach of duty, land could be withdrawn from the respective family.

This practice, the so-called *ilku* system, was applied widely amongst the employees of the Middle Assyrian state. It is still unknown, however, what criteria were used to calculate the extent of an allotment. High-ranking officials were granted extensive estates, perhaps in conjunction with entire villages and their inhabitants. In contrast, the plots of lower-ranking attendants were apparently not sufficient to support an entire family. Therefore, this group was dependent on additional rations (ibid.: 36–8).

In theory, the close link between the attendant and his *ilku* land resulted from the principle “land for service.” But as soon as Middle Assyrian written sources become available, factors that would lead to the destabilization of the system are already present: the *ilku* duty did not need to be exercised in person, but could be performed by a substitute or fulfilled with a payment of gold. Furthermore, *ilku* land could be sold, with the purchaser having to prove that the duties of the previous owner would still be fulfilled. As a rule, the latter had to continue performing this duty after the sale, tilling the field as a dependent on behalf of the new owner. In the long term, this meant that the close connection between *ilku* duty and land tenure was partially abolished.

In order to register and administrate heterogeneous groups of people, the Assyrian administration used waxed tablets, the so-called *lē’u* (pl. *lē’ānu*), a practice that can be traced back to the reign of Adad-nirari I (Freydank 2001: 107; cf. Postgate 2007: 143–7), when the growing administrative tasks of the Assyrian state necessitated a more efficient means of personnel administration. The writing boards served various purposes, including the acquisition of data concerning available manpower; the documentation of complex structures of responsibilities; and the calculation of required provisions.

An administrative document regarding the workforce that was employed for building activities in the royal palaces of Ashur and Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta gives an impression of the workforce’s demographics (MARV II 17:1–14): among the 2,000 men of the “writing board of the king” (*lē’u ša šarre*), it lists diverse groups such as recruits (*ḥurādu*), inhabitants of various Assyrian cities, “engineers/architects” (*šalimpāju*), cult functionaries, and carpenters. Another

document (MARV I 5) registers the chiefs of various groups (exorcists, diviners, and attendants of the royal shed) who were subordinate to several high-ranking officials such as the “governor of the land” (*šakin māte*) or the “chief administrator/treasurer” (*mašennu*). In other cases, military commanders such as the *tartennu* (Freydank 2001: 110) or the “herald” (*nāgīru*) are mentioned, the latter involved in supplying the army with provisions when the troops were returning from war (MARV I 1 iv 27–35; Freydank 1974: 69–71).

Taxation

The mechanisms for applying taxes in the Middle Assyrian kingdom are not yet fully understood. As we have seen above, the state allocated land plots with the expectation of military and civil service (*ilku*). Besides that, there must have been the possibility of recruiting people without an *ilku* obligation or recruiting owners of private estates. It seems that these are summarized as *perru* troops (*šābū perrūtu*) under the command of the “lords of the *perru*” (*bēlē perre*; see [Figure 7.1](#)). The levy of further duties on these properties cannot yet be proven.

The only direct tax payable by individuals that is known at this point is associated with the import of goods from abroad. According to a private document from Tell al-Rimah dealing with the taxation of a two-year-old mare, a rate of fifty minas of lead was determined, i.e. presumably 25 percent of the purchase price (Jakob 2003: 170–2). The evidence of payment had to be provided by the final buyer and not by the importer.

Other obligations imposed by the state and directly or indirectly benefitting the ruler, members of the royal family, or religious institutions include the *ginā’u* tax, already mentioned in connection with the provincial government. Tribute (*madattu*) was also of great importance. Generally, a victorious king never left a conquered land without plundering it. By doing so he was able, inter alia, to reduce the costs of war. Thus, the booty became a kind of reparation. Continuous payments of tribute by the defeated party served the dual purpose of indicating the latter’s loyalty as well as contributing to the income of the Assyrian state.

“Audience gifts” (*nāmurtu*) are attested by a 12th century BCE archive from Ashur. These texts register such gifts, normally sheep, to the prince Ninurta-tukul-Aššur, a son of king Aššur-dan (1168–1133 BCE). An account of a period of nearly six months between the 12th day of the month of *Kalmartu* and the 22nd day of *Ša-kēnāte* reveals that, during this time, 914 sheep were delivered by officials to the king. Obviously, the *nāmurtu* gift was

economically important (Donbaz 1976: 15).

Middle Assyrian Society: Social Strata

The majority of written sources from the Middle Assyrian period pertain to the area of public administration. Even archives from private houses contain many documents dealing with administrative matters (Pedersén 1998: 86f.). Information regarding the living conditions during this period is primarily available for the socio-economic “elite.”

The highest segment of the society was constituted by a small upper class. Its members were mainly recruited from long-established large families, the so-called “houses” (Jakob 2003: 23¹⁷⁴), and occupied all of the important offices within the administration. The categories of “public” and “private” were not clearly separated. Administrative documents have been found with contracts, loans, and letters, recording both the family’s private activities and the obligations of public office (Postgate 1988). The officials of the crown occasionally used the resources of the palace that were placed in their responsibility to generate private profits (Jakob 2003: 52). This can be proven by a document that records the declaration of a certain Aššur-iddin, son of Urad-ilene, otherwise known as an important official, a “representative of the king” (*qēpu ša šarre*). He states in this text that he did not use royal workmen for private purposes. The text clearly shows that such behavior would have been treated as treason, declaring: “If Aššur-iddin (had really done what he has been accused of), he would have hated the life of the king, his lord” (Brinkman and Donbaz 1985: 86). On the other hand, officials had to allot portions of their own funds to public institutions if asked to do so (Jakob 2003: 52; 181).

The capital required for this came from several sources. Most importantly, high officials were provided with rural estates, often fortified farmstead of considerable size that were equipped with a reasonable workforce of plowmen and harvesters and were called *dunnu* (see Wiggermann 2000). There were several possibilities for additional income. Firstly, members of the upper class could utilize their stocks to give out loans to private individuals. The conditions of such agreements were often very unfavorable to the debtor. The debtor had to pay an interest of up to 100 percent in addition to the delivery of further commodities (sheep, vessels) and services (additional harvesters), generally during harvest time, when all available workers were actually needed on the field(s) of the debtor (Jakob 2003: 344ff.). Secondly, officials of the state administration were allowed to receive a “gift” (*šulmānu*) from private persons, in exchange for their promise to examine requests that had been submitted to the administration. The amount of this “legal bribe” was recorded on a tablet, followed by a sentence such as: “He shall examine his

case (and then) receive his gift” and witnessed by a scribe (Jakob 2003: 52f.).

Those who did not belong to the rather small upper class could hope for the king’s gift of mercy (the so-called *rīmuttu*; see *ibid.*: 51f.), but, in general, had to content themselves with a much lower standard of living. They did not constitute a homogeneous social class. The group closest to the upper class consisted of free men (*a’īlu*) who likewise received allotments of land for performing official duties (see above, “Recruitment and Labor Administration”), but could not live on them alone due to the small size of these lots. In contrast, the *šiluḫlu* (*ibid.*: 39–42) did not have access to land ownership and were dependent on what they received from the state administration (food supplies and clothes; cf. below, “The Middle Assyrian Family”). The designation of this group is derived from the Hurrian *šelluḫli*, which refers to a free man who enters the service of another one by his own initiative, receiving rations and clothes in return. He was allowed to withdraw from the contract of employment by providing a substitute to fulfill his obligations. It still cannot be determined with certainty whether or not the Middle Assyrian *šiluḫlu* had originally possessed similar rights. Likewise, we cannot determine how they came into the situation reflected in our sources. It seems probable that the *šiluḫlu* were recruited, at least partially, from prisoners of war and deportees.

The main field of employment of the *šiluḫlu* seems to have been the agricultural sector. Here, they were highly dependent upon their respective employers, but they were not necessarily the latter’s property. This can be proved by several documents from Ashur regarding a hereditary division (*ibid.*: 279–81). In these documents, it is recorded that nearly one thousand *šiluḫlu*, formerly the dependants of the late Šamaš-aḫa-iddina, were divided amongst at least three sons. Royal representatives were responsible for carrying out this procedure. At a certain point, the king himself was involved in detaching a small contingent from the total amount in order to assign it to another person whose affiliation to Šamaš-aḫa-iddina’s family remains unclear to us. Hence it seems that the *šiluḫlu* were once recruited from prisoners of war or deportees and then transferred from the state administration to an official, Šamaš-aḫa-iddina, with an allotment of land. These people continued to be considered state property so that the king could assign them to whomever it seemed appropriate for him to do so.

Similar to *šiluḫlu*, the term “village resident” (*ālāyû*) denotes a person who was dependent on the owner of the land (an individual or the palace) on which he lived (see CAD A I, 391). The “Middle Assyrian Laws” (MAL § 45) distinguish the “village resident” from the *ālik ilke* (see above, “Recruitment and Labor Administration”) on the one hand, and the *hupšu* on the other. The evidence from other periods of ancient Near Eastern history and regions outside of Assyria suggests that the latter were also members of a lower social class. They are often mentioned in military contexts, *inter alia*, in an

inscription of Shalmaneser III (858–824 BCE; RIMA 3, A.0.102.5 v 3). What is referred to here is the army of the Babylonian usurper Marduk-bel-usati. Strangely enough, within the *tākultu* ritual, images of *ḥupšu* people are mentioned immediately after statues of kings and princes (Meinhold 2009: 414f.; 422).

The Middle Assyrian Family

Marriage was not left to the prospective spouses but was, rather, negotiated between both families involved. This matter is treated in the “Middle Assyrian Laws” (MAL §48 and *passim*; see Lafont 2003: 535–8). Further information about the living conditions of families in the Middle Assyrian period can be derived from the census and ration lists of the administration.

A small-sized family was the norm (Freydank 1980: 101; Jakob 2009: 97–105). Polygamy was permitted among the Assyrians (MAL § 41), as well as amongst Hurrian and Elamite deportees, but was by no means the rule. Additionally, servants are attested as members of these households, either brought directly from their place of origin or allocated to the household by the Assyrian administration.

In the aforementioned lists, individual members of a family are classified by sex and age and related to the head of the household. According to the principle whereby all adults were obligated to perform public work in return for rations and other allotments, men were, moreover, referred to with their particular professions, whereas their wives were normally designated simply as “workers” (*ša šipre*). If there was no male head of household alive, his widow could represent the household in his place (Freydank 1980: 96f.; cf. below MAL § 46). For children, there was a stepped system of age groups. This classification system helped calculate the individual rations of grain a person received each month:

Adult man	3	<i>sūtu</i>	(1 <i>sūtu</i> ≈ 8 liters; cf. <i>RIA</i> 7, 501f.)
Adult woman	2	<i>sūtu</i>	
Apprentice (<i>talmīdu/talmittu</i>)	1.5	<i>sūtu</i>	
Young child (<i>tari’ultarītu</i>)	1.25	<i>sūtu</i>	
Weaned child (<i>pīrsulpīrsatu</i>)	1	<i>sūtu</i>	
Suckling (<i>ša irte</i>)	0.75	<i>sūtu</i>	

Detailed information about the social position of women can be taken from Tablet A of the “Middle Assyrian Laws” (Roth 1995: 153ff.), although there

is much uncertainty among scholars as to whether these regulations ever had direct legal force. The laws refer to various kinds of criminal offences, especially sex crimes, and marital law. In the street, honest women, including wives and widows, were obligated to wear a veil. The same is true for the “concubine” (*esertu*) while she was accompanying her mistress (MAL § 40). While a *qadiltu* priestess (see Jakob 2003: 537–9) was allowed to be veiled when she was married, this was always prohibited for prostitutes (*ḥarīmtu*) and slave women. The connection between veil and marriage is revealed in MAL § 41: “If a man veils his concubine in public by declaring: ‘she is my wife,’ this woman will be his wife.” The children of a concubine were lower in rank than the descendants of a wife, but they could inherit if the marriage of the latter remained childless. The care for widows is regulated by MAL § 46 and depended on their status (first or second wife) and the existence of children of their own.

MAL § 45 regulates what was to be done in case a woman was married and, later, her husband was taken prisoner of war. First, she had to wait for two years. If she had a son or her father-in-law was still alive and able to support her, then she received no support from the government. If she was alone and the wife of a free man (*aššat a’ īle*), she was allowed to claim support from the palace. Provided she had no property (lit. “field and house”) she could make an application to the “judges” (*da”ānū*), i.e. officials of the crown, who were supposed to help her.

Ethnic Groups

As a result of Assyria’s military successes and the subsequent deportations, contacts between the inhabitants of the Assyrian heartland and foreign ethnic groups grew closer. Foreigners brought not only their manpower, but also their cultural traditions (Jakob 2005).

Due to Assyria’s concentration on its expansion into Syria and into the regions north and northeast of the Assyrian heartland during the 13th century BCE, Hurrian people (*šubri’u*) formed the largest group amongst the deportees. Following the Babylonian campaigns of Tukulti-Ninurta I, many inhabitants of southern Mesopotamia, referred to as “Kassites” by the Assyrian administration, came to Assyria. It seems that most of them held inferior positions in Assyrian society. They were employed, for instance, for construction projects of the crown, especially for building palaces and sanctuaries in the Assyrian capital. Some people from abroad managed to assume more prominent positions. Shalmaneser I took a selection of young men from Urartu to enter his service at the royal court (RIMA 1, A.0.77.1:42–4), whereas his son Tukulti-Ninurta recruited bowmen from among Hurrian and Elamite deportees for the army (Postgate 2008: 86–88; Jakob 2009: 97–

The relationship to non-sedentary groups was inconsistent. While Aramaean Ahlamu nomads appear as enemies in the royal inscriptions of Shalmaneser I, the Suti'u were later appreciated as trading partners or scouts (Jakob 2009: 18). The onomasticon of the late 11th century BCE indicates social changes that had taken place by then. Even though several earlier kings had boasted that they had succeeded in defeating the Aramaeans decisively, many Arameaens had managed to settle and were now well established within the kingdom of Assyria.

Abbreviations

KAR

= E. Ebeling, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts*, 2 volumes, Leipzig: 1915–23.

MARV

= H. Freydank et al., *Mittellassyrische Rechtsurkunden und Verwaltungstexte*, Berlin, Saarbrücken 1976–.

RIMA

= A. K. Grayson, *The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Assyrian Periods*, 3 volumes, Toronto: Toronto University Press 1987–96.

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Further Reading

Fundamental: Jakob 2003. For the Middle Assyrian political apparatus, see Postgate 2010, for land tenure, Postgate 1982, and for a general assessment of the Middle Assyrian and other contemporary bureaucracies in Western Asia, Postgate 2013. Saporetti 1979 deals with the status of women in Middle Assyrian times, and Saporetti 2008 with Middle Assyrian legal practices. Freydank 2009 addresses the conflict between royal power and high officials in a challenging environment, as well as the social impact of mass deportations.

CHAPTER 8

The Neo-Assyrian Period (ca. 1000–609 BCE)

Eckart Frahm

Introduction

This chapter provides a historical sketch of the Neo-Assyrian period, the era that saw the slow rise of the Assyrian empire as well as its much faster eventual fall.¹ When the curtain lifts, at the close of the “Dark Age” that lasted until the middle of the tenth century BCE, the Assyrian state still finds itself in the grip of the massive crisis in the course of which it suffered significant territorial losses. Step by step, however, a number of assertive and ruthless Assyrian kings of the late tenth and ninth centuries manage to reconquer the lost lands and reestablish Assyrian power, especially in the Khabur region. From the late ninth to the mid-eighth century, Assyria experiences an era of internal fragmentation, with Assyrian kings and high officials, the so-called “magnates,” competing for power. The accession of Tiglath-pileser III in 745 BCE marks the end of this period and the beginning of Assyria’s imperial phase. The magnates lose much of their influence, and, during the empire’s heyday, Assyrian monarchs conquer and rule a territory of unprecedented size, including Babylonia, the Levant, and Egypt. The downfall comes within a few years: between 615 and 609 BCE, the allied forces of the Babylonians and Medes defeat and destroy all the major Assyrian cities, bringing Assyria’s political power, and the “Neo-Assyrian period,” to an end. What follows is a long and shadowy coda to Assyrian history. There is no longer an Assyrian state, but in the ancient Assyrian heartland, especially in the city of Ashur, some of Assyria’s cultural and religious traditions survive for another 800 years.

Politically and economically, the Neo-Assyrian period is characterized by the enormous expansion the Assyrian state experienced during this time, and its transformation into what may well have been the first empire in world history. Pinpointing something like a Neo-Assyrian “mentality” is difficult, not the least because of the large influx of foreigners who were integrated into Assyrian society between the tenth and the seventh century BCE. Some characteristics that seem to define the Neo-Assyrian mindset do, however, stand out. To begin with, the Neo-Assyrians apparently had a particularly strong sense of order, manifested in such diverse features as, on the one hand,

the square and regular shape of the characters of their writing system and, on the other, the well organized administration of their provinces (Radner 2006–2008) – in some respects, the Neo-Assyrians can be described as the “Prussians” of the ancient Near East.² The idea of order, based on a well-established hierarchy of superiors and subjects, was actively promoted by the Assyrian conquerors to justify their imperial mission. Sargon II, for instance, proudly proclaimed that he had defeated a number of Arab tribes that, previously, “had known no overseer or commander” (*ša aklu šāpiru lā īdūma*, Fuchs 1994: 110, line 121).

A strongly developed “acquisitiveness” represents another defining feature of the Neo-Assyrian mindset. One of its manifestations are the ambitious commercial enterprises in which Assyrians were involved. Even though they were no longer the predominant class they had been during the Old Assyrian period, Assyrian traders continued to play an important role in the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods (Radner 1997). But over the centuries, the striving of the Assyrians for greater material prosperity took a new, more aggressive turn. Instead of focusing on peaceful commercial interactions with distant lands, the Assyrians resorted increasingly to the use of violent means to obtain foreign goods. Almost every year, during the summer months, Assyrian armies would now attack towns and cities outside the Assyrian heartland, rob them of their possessions, impose a regular tribute on their rulers, and eventually annex them (Fuchs 2005). Raw materials and finished products, as well as people, animals, and even trees and plants were brought to Assyria from far away places.

The mercantile mentality that had originally motivated the Assyrians in their pursuit of material wealth can still be detected in the way Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions inventory, in the spirit of a diligent accountant’s bookkeeping, the numbers of killed, maimed, or deported enemies and the exact amount of booty and tribute delivered to the king; but the political and economic reality was now a very different one. Imperial exploitation, and a “tributary mode of production,” had to a significant extent (yet not entirely) replaced a commercial system in which merchants dealt with their trading partners in foreign lands on an equal footing.

Another form of acquisitiveness lies behind Assyria’s attitude towards Babylonian traditions, which strongly influenced Neo-Assyrian elite culture (see [Chapters 15–21](#)). Many literary and religious texts and virtually all learned treatises studied by Assyrian scholars were written in Babylonian language, often by Babylonian scribes (Fincke 2003/04). Like Greek civilization among the Romans, Babylonian culture enjoyed enormous prestige among the Assyrians, who often treated their southern “brothers” more leniently than any other people in their vast empire. Yet when the Babylonians, despite the privileges they enjoyed, continued to oppose Assyrian rule, the disappointed love of the Assyrians eventually turned into

hatred. Twice during the seventh century BCE, Babylon suffered death and destruction at the hands of the Assyrians before eventually defeating her northern neighbor and taking bloody revenge by ringing the death knell on the Assyrian state.

Chronology and Sources

The basic chronology of the Neo-Assyrian period is well established. The final sections of the famous Assyrian King List (Glassner 2004: 136–45) and a few additional king lists, both from Assyria and Babylonia (Grayson 1980–83: 90–8, 101, 116–22, 124–5), provide concise yet comprehensive inventories of the Neo-Assyrian monarchs and information on the lengths of their reigns. Their general reliability is confirmed by various Neo-Assyrian eponym lists and eponym “chronicles” (Millard 1994; Glassner 2004: 164–77). The former include, in chronological order, the names and titles of the officials after whom the Assyrians named individual years (the so-called eponyms); the latter add (beginning with 857 BCE) some basic information on events that happened during the years in question. A reference in two eponym chronicles to a solar eclipse, datable on astronomical grounds to 763 BCE (Millard 1994: 41; Hunger 2008), has helped to establish the absolute chronology of the Neo-Assyrian period and continues to serve as an important chronological anchor for Mesopotamian history in general from the Late Bronze Age onwards. Unfortunately, there are so far no eponym lists or chronicles for the period after 649 BCE, which means that some uncertainty remains with regard to the chronology of the last decades of the Neo-Assyrian empire (Reade 1998).

Slightly more detailed information on historical events is found in some additional chronicle-type texts. The so-called “Synchronistic History” (Grayson 1975: 157–70; Glassner 2004: 176–83) provides selective information, from an Assyrian viewpoint, on the relations between Assyria and Babylonia up to the reign of Adad-nirari III (810–783 BCE). Several Babylonian chronicles (Grayson 1975: 69–98; Glassner 2004: 193–224) cast light on the later phases of the interactions between the two states from a Babylonian perspective.

Important though they are, the aforementioned sources do not allow us to reconstruct much more than a skeleton of Neo-Assyrian history. The flesh and blood, so to speak, of that history is provided by a number of additional source types, unevenly distributed throughout the period from 1000 to 609 BCE. Most important, and available in abundant numbers from the middle of the 10th century onwards, are the “official” inscriptions written in the name of Assyrian kings (see, *inter alia*, the RIM and RINAP series, KAL 3, Fuchs 1994; Borger 1996; Frahm 1997). Assyrian royal inscriptions are found on

tablets, prisms, and cylinders made of clay, on stone tablets and slabs, and on a number of other objects left by the kings in visible and invisible locations in palaces, temples, and fortification buildings in various Assyrian cities. Others were inscribed on stelae and rock reliefs in far away countries (Fales 1999–2001). The focus of these texts is on military campaigns and construction work. Some of the inscriptions are extremely long and detailed, comprising more than 1000 lines.

It seems that Assyrian royal inscriptions do not “invent” royal campaigns or building projects, which enhances their value as historical sources.

Nonetheless, using them for a reconstruction of Neo-Assyrian history requires some caution. Often enough, the inscriptions provide no exact information on the date of the events they describe, or, worse, list these events in an order not based on actual chronology. Sometimes, they amalgamate in one narrative events that happened at different times (for an example, see Liverani 1981). Moreover, Assyrian royal inscriptions, as a rule, tend to focus their attention on successful endeavors, all ascribed to the king alone. Failures the Assyrian king experienced usually remain unrecorded, while royal enterprises that yielded mixed results are often presented in a more positive light than warranted. Fortunately, the modern researcher is not entirely without tools when evaluating the historicity of the events described in the royal inscriptions. Of particular significance is the critical study of the semantic “codes” applied by the scribes who composed them (Fales 1981). Thus, the statement that Assyrian troops had trapped an enemy king “like a bird in a cage” in his city suggests that they had actually failed to conquer the city and capture its ruler (Tadmor 1994: 79).

Particularly when studying “Late Assyrian” history, i.e., the period from the middle of the eighth to the last decades of the seventh century BCE, the modern historian has access to several additional groups of sources. Most revealing, and an important corrective to the biased “in dubio pro rege” approach of the Assyrian royal inscriptions, are the thousands of letters from the Assyrian “state archives” in Kalḫu (Calah) and Nineveh that have survived from this time. Most of them have been published in the *State Archives of Assyria* (SAA) series, in volumes 1, 5, 8, 10, 13, 15, and 16–19. Many of the letters in question deal with what went wrong in Assyria and the territories under her rule – turmoil in the provinces, failed campaigns, natural disasters, and political opposition both at home and abroad – thus providing us with a more realistic – and more dramatic – view of Neo-Assyrian politics than the royal inscriptions (Frahm 2015b). The available letters seem to cluster around limited periods of time (Parpola 1981), illuminating, like lightning in the night, brief moments of Late Assyrian history only; but what they reveal about the power dynamics within the Assyrian state, the role of military and civilian officials, spies, priests, and scholars, most likely applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to all of it.

Royal grants and decrees (see SAA 12 and KAL 3: 124–7) provide important historical information as well, and so do international treaties and tablets inscribed with loyalty oaths to be sworn to the crown by Assyrians and vassals alike (see SAA 2; KAL 3: 129–36; Lauinger 2012). Like the letters, most of these texts date to the Late Assyrian period, but some cast light on earlier times. Administrative documents, primarily from palace archives in Kalḫu and Nineveh (CTN 1–3 and SAA 7 and 11), offer information on the organization of Assyria’s civil service and army, while tablets with oracle queries addressed by the king to the sun god (SAA 4) cast light on the planning of military campaigns and the appointment of high officials. Legal and economic documents from private archives illuminate, at least to some extent, the social and economic situation in Late Assyrian cities, especially Nineveh and Ashur, while thousands of religious, scholarly, and literary texts from libraries in Ashur, Kalḫu, Nineveh, Sultantepe, and a few other places give us insights into Assyria’s intellectual history (for overviews, see Parpola 1983; Frahm 1999a; Brown 2000; Fincke 2003/04; Frame and George 2005; Maul 2010; and the contributions by Fincke and Heeßel in the present volume). The famous library of Assurbanipal at Nineveh remains the most important repository of such texts ever excavated in Mesopotamia.

We know that Neo-Assyrian scribes used not only clay tablets, but also other media for their daily communications. They wrote in cuneiform on wooden boards with a surface covered with wax, and in Aramaic on papyrus and leather. Besides a few badly preserved examples of the former, however, no texts thus recorded have survived. The vast majority of the Aramaic documentation from the Neo-Assyrian period is irretrievably lost. Our only window into the use of Aramaic by scribes who were active within the Neo-Assyrian state is provided by a limited number of clay tablets that were either inscribed entirely in Aramaic (Lemaire 2010; Lipiński 2010) or supplied with Aramaic “epigraphs” (Röllig 2005). There is also an Aramaic ostrakon from Ashur that includes important historical information (Fales 2010b).

A certain number of texts written by non-Assyrians contribute to a better understanding of Neo-Assyrian history as well, by providing outside perspectives. The chronicles and king lists from Babylonia have already been mentioned; some Babylonian royal inscriptions can be added to them (RIMB 2; Schaudig 2001; and the texts listed in Da Riva 2008; see also [Chapter 28](#)). Texts produced during the Neo-Assyrian period by non-Mesopotamian rulers, whether in Aramaic language and script, Luwian hieroglyphs, or the Urartian and Elamite versions of cuneiform writing, provide limited information on Assyrian activities in northern Syria, Anatolia, and western and southwestern Iran (Tropper 1993; Hawkins 2000; Salvini 2008; König 1965). The portions of the Hebrew Bible that deal with the western expansion of Assyria, found in 2 Kings, Isaiah, and various other prophetic books, are in many respects intriguing, but ought to be used with caution since their final redaction usually

postdates the Neo-Assyrian period by centuries (see [Chapter 29](#)). The Aramaic Ahiqar legend, known from a papyrus from the ancient Egyptian site of Elephantine as well as later translations and adaptations, and a few additional Aramaic papyrus fragments from Egypt tell stories about the Assyrian kings Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Assurbanipal (Dalley 2001; Ryholt 2004). Though likewise much later than the events they describe, and in many respects quite fantastic, they represent interesting examples of what seems to have been the popular vision of Late Assyrian history in ancient Western Asia. The accounts of Assyrian history provided by classical authors such as Ctesias (Lenfant 2004) and others (see Rollinger 2011) are often based on such popular lore as well (see [Chapter 30](#)).

In addition to textual sources, modern historians of the Neo-Assyrian period have access to various types of pictorial remains, from miniature seal impressions showing royal, mythological, and other scenes (Herbordt 1992; Winter 2000) to the hundreds of large wall slabs with depictions of military campaigns lining the walls of Assyrian palaces (Winter 1997; Russell 1999; see also [Chapter 24](#)). They can study Assyrian material culture by examining Assyrian grave goods, whether found in tombs in private houses of the urban middle class or in the burial chambers of the Assyrian kings and queens in the Old Palace in Ashur and the Northwest Palace in Kalḫu (Mofidi-Nasrabadi 1999; Curtis 2008; Lundström 2009; Hauser 2012). And finally, they can analyze the architecture and spatial organization of capital cities such as Ashur, Kalḫu, and Nineveh (see [Chapter 23](#)), and of provincial towns such as Ḫuzirina or Guzana, as well as the complex networks of roads and canals that crossed the Assyrian heartland and adjoining territories – to the extent they can be reconstructed from finds on the ground and modern satellite imagery (Bagg 2000; Altaweel 2003; Ur 2005). Taking into account these manifold physical manifestations of Assyrian civilization can help amend the historical information gleaned from the textual evidence in important ways.

The Crisis Years (ca. 1050–935)

The demarcation of historical periods is often difficult, and the problem of establishing when exactly the transition from the Middle Assyrian to the so-called Neo-Assyrian period took place is no exception. The beginnings of the latter are often associated (for example by A. K. Grayson in RIMA 2: 131) with Aššur-dan II (934–912). The main reason for considering the reign of this king a new beginning is that it terminates a poorly documented period during which Assyria seems to have experienced a major crisis. With Aššur-dan II, who left several royal inscriptions describing military campaigns in the periphery of the Assyrian core area, we appear to enter an era that saw a resurgence of Assyrian power.

This traditional chronological division is, admittedly, not quite as clear-cut as it may seem at first glance. We do have a number of Assyrian royal inscriptions from the 120 year long alleged “dark age” that preceded Aššur-dan’s II reign, especially from the reign of Aššurnāširpal I (1049–1031) (RIMA 2: 113–30, 254–6; KAL 3: 117–23). The gap apparently separating the end of the well documented reign of Aššur-bel-kala (1073–1056) and the beginning of that of Aššur-dan II is, hence, less wide than is often assumed. Moreover, there are a number of features usually associated with the Neo-Assyrian era that can be traced back to late Middle Assyrian times. The royal inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076), for instance, bear some conspicuous similarities with those of later Neo-Assyrian kings, among them their “annalistic” structure and their use of Babylonian month names, as well as the fact that some of them were inscribed on clay prisms. Similarly, the recently published documents from Giricano (Dunnu-ša-Uzibi near Tuṣḥan in the Upper Tigris region), which date to the reign of Aššur-bel-kala, are written in a language that includes features commonly regarded as Neo-Assyrian (Radner 2004).

Yet even though the transition from the Middle Assyrian to the Neo-Assyrian era was probably more gradual than is usually assumed, there is no question that the 11th through the first half of the 10th century was a time of crisis that brought about important changes in Assyria. In the 12th century, the collapse of Bronze Age civilization in the ancient Near East, triggered by a mix of ecological and political factors, had led to the disappearance of the Hittite state in Anatolia, the withdrawal of Egyptian forces from Western Asia, and the breakdown of many of the small Hittite and Egyptian vassal states in the Levant. New players, often organized along ethnic-tribal lines, had begun to take their place: the Philistines and Hebrews in Palestine, the Arabs on the Arabian peninsula, the Neo-Hittite Luwians in Anatolia and northern Syria, and the West-Semitic Aramaeans in Syria (Strobel 2011; Galil et al. 2012; Lipiński 2000). Cuneiform, widely used in Western Asia by the political and cultural elites to communicate with one another until then, was replaced in the west by new and simpler alphabetic writing systems.

Assyria was originally only marginally affected by the disruptive events that unfolded in Anatolia and the Levant. Before long, however, the eastward movement of Aramaean tribes began to unravel substantial portions of the Assyrian state. A chronicle describing the last years of the reign of Tiglath-pileser I shows that the Aramaeans had advanced so far that they were able to conduct raids against the Assyrian core area, temporarily affecting even the capital city Ashur (Glassner 2004: 188).

Since the Aramaeans had no central institutions, their attacks lacked coordination, and so the Assyrians were able to score repeated victories against individual groups of them. These victories are recorded with great fanfare in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser I and Aššur-bēl-kala, who both

claim that their troops marched to the Mediterranean, passing large stretches of land now inhabited by Aramaeans. But the guerilla tactics the Aramaeans employed, and their ability to quickly withdraw into difficult terrain when they were attacked, prevented the Assyrian armies from defeating them decisively.

A recently published chronicle – and in all likelihood also the inscription on the White Obelisk (see KAL 3: 117–23) – indicate that under Aššurnāṣirpal I (1049–1031), Assyrian troops were still capable of conducting fairly substantial campaigns. From the nearly century-long period between 1030 and 935, however, we have no Assyrian texts recording military activities whatsoever, and the fact that two long-ruling kings of this era, Shalmaneser II (1030–1019) and Aššur-rabi II (1012–972), were remembered in later Assyrian tradition as having suffered painful territorial losses (RIMA 2: 133; RIMA 3: 19) indicates that this cannot simply be ascribed to the chances of discovery. Assyria was, quite clearly, at the nadir of her power in the decades before and after 1000 BCE. Many Middle Assyrian administrative centers in the north and west lay in ruins, and local rulers vied with tribal chiefs for control over the formerly Assyrian territories in this region.

However, not everything was lost. Assyria's culture and religion survived the disruptions, and despite the aforementioned raids by Aramaean tribes, Assyria's core area on the middle Tigris – as well as a few strongholds further west – remained fairly firmly under the control of the Assyrian kings, who apparently never ceased to believe in their ability to regain their previous strength. Shalmaneser II and the rulers who followed him during the crisis years and the subsequent "Reconquista" period bore throne names inspired by the names of their powerful Middle Assyrian forebears (a tradition that continued until the eighth century BCE, see Frahm 2005b), which indicates their determination to restore Assyria's former glory. Thanks to this determination, and due to the geographic remoteness of the Assyrian core area from the Levant, the center of the political storm, Assyria managed to survive the crisis years without suffering the same complete collapse that many of the states around it experienced. In the long run, Assyria profited, in fact, from the chaos that ravaged Western Asia between the 12th and the 10th century. With their old political structures to a large extent shattered, the territories neighboring Assyria became, in the following centuries, easy prey for Assyria's conquering armies.

The Reconquista Period (934–824)

The period during which Assyria regained her former strength can be divided into two main phases, each roughly half a century long: an initial phase, from the reign of Aššur-dan II (934–912) to that of Tukulti-Ninurta II (890–884),

that saw the slow and brutal beginnings of Assyria's reconquest of her lost territories; and a second one under Aššurnaširpal II (883–859) and Shalmaneser III (858–824), marked by the move of the royal court to Kalḫu in central Assyria, during which Assyria became the predominant political power in Western Asia (even though without yet enjoying the complete hegemony she gained during the imperial era of the eighth and seventh centuries).

The period of reconsolidation began for Assyria with the reign of Aššur-dan II (934–912).³ As stated before, Aššur-dan was the first king who, after a long period of silence, left again a substantial number of inscriptions describing military activities. His campaigns focused on the northeastern and northwestern borderlands of Assyria's core territory. Among the victories he claimed for himself was the defeat of the small kingdom of Katmuḫu, situated towards the east of the Khabur triangle. During the Middle Assyrian period, Katmuḫu had been an Assyrian province, but at some point during the crisis years of the 11th and 10th century, it had gained independence. Aššur-dan reconquered Katmuḫu, plundered and destroyed the royal palace in its capital, brought its king to Arbela, and, after flaying and executing him, displayed his skin on the wall of one of his cities. Rather than implementing direct rule, however, Aššur-dan put another local dignitary on Katmuḫu's throne, thus turning it into a vassal state that had to provide tribute and troops on a regular basis (RIMA 2: 133–4).

Aššur-dan's approach towards Kathmuḫu remained a model for Assyrian foreign politics for quite some time. Only repeated opposition on the part of local populations and the strategic importance of specific places prompted the Assyrian kings to annex foreign territories and turn them into provinces during the early phase of the Reconquista period. This saved resources, but it also meant that the Assyrians had to keep up a fairly high threat level in order to keep their vassals in line, as is illustrated by the numerous references in early Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions to acts of violence committed by the Assyrian conquerors.

To his credit, Aššur-dan also took a number of more benign measures to recreate Assyria's former glory. In his inscriptions, he claims that, in order to strengthen the urban centers, agricultural base, and infrastructure of his realm, he “brought back the exhausted [people] of Assyria [who] had abandoned [their cities ... in the face of] ... famine and [had gone up] to other lands ...; constructed [palaces in] (various) districts ...; and [hitched up] plows ..., [piling up] more grain than ever before” (RIMA 2: 134–5). Aššur-dan's three successors on the Assyrian throne boast of very similar achievements in their inscriptions, indicating that Assyria's rise from the ashes during the early Neo-Assyrian period was not only based on state-run protection rackets against foreign rulers, but also on pursuing a systematic policy of internal development.

Military and civil operations alike profited during the early Neo-Assyrian period from the increasing availability of iron, mostly from sources in southern Anatolia and Lebanon, and from improvements in metalwork technology. Slowly, iron began to replace bronze in the manufacture of weapons, agricultural implements, and construction tools, a process that initiated the era dubbed the Iron Age in historical archaeology (Fales 2010a: 101–4).

Aššur-dan's politics paved the way towards more sustained efforts to expand Assyria's influence. These began with his successor Adad-nirari II (910–891), whose *res gestae* form a fairly substantial corpus.⁴

Of great strategic consequence were Adad-nirari's forays beyond the Lower Zab into regions southeast of Assyria's core area, which had been under Babylonian control until then. At one point, an Assyrian army advanced as far as the city of Der close to the Elamite border. Adad-nirari had to withdraw later from these far-away regions, but managed to keep possession of the important city of Arrapha (Kirkuk) and the area around it. In the following centuries, Arrapha served as starting point for numerous Assyrian campaigns to the east (Fuchs 2011: 262–4). According to the "Synchronistic History," Adad-nirari was able to secure the newly drawn borders between Assyria and Babylonia by prompting the Babylonian king Nabû-šumu-ukin to sign a peace treaty with him. The two kings sealed their agreement by marrying each other's daughters (Glassner 2004: 180–1).

Adad-nirari rebuilt the city of Apku, situated half-way between Nineveh and the Sinjar mountain, and converted it into an administrative center. Apku was one of the cities that had fallen into ruins during the period of unrest around 1000 BCE (RIMA 2: 149). Further west, in the Khabur triangle, the king continued to put pressure on the small states that had emerged there after Assyrian control of the region had collapsed at the end of the Middle Assyrian period. After protracted battles, a number of local rulers were either replaced by pro-Assyrian puppet-kings (such as in 896 in Našibina, modern Nisibis) or became vassals (such as in Guzana, modern Tell Halaf). In the end, Adad-nirari was able to undertake a long march down the Khabur river and then eastwards along the Euphrates, during which he collected tribute from numerous local rulers without facing any opposition (RIMA 2: 153–4).

Adad-nirari's son and successor Tukulti-Ninurta II (890–884) continued the policies of his father.⁵ Some of Tukulti-Ninurta's early campaigns, about which we are poorly informed, were aimed at strengthening Assyrian control over the eastern lands of Kirruri, Ḫubuškia, and Gilzanu, the latter of which supplied Assyria with horses. In 885, Tukulti-Ninurta repeated his father's march through the territories of his western vassals, but in reverse direction. According to a long description of this show of strength, known from three clay tablets from Ashur (RIMA 2: 163–88; KAL 3: 49–53), the Assyrian army went down the Wadi Tharthar to Dur-Kurigalzu and Sippar and then up the

Euphrates, where, among others, the leader of Suḫi, a state with close historical ties with Babylon, sent tribute to Tukulti-Ninurta. In Terqa, in the vicinity of the mouth of the Khabur river, the Assyrian king left an inscription on a locally produced stela (Tournay 1998). The campaign continued along the Khabur up to Naṣibina, from where the Assyrians moved westwards to Ḫuzirina on the Baliḫ and then northwards to fight the Mušku in Cappadocia. On several occasions during the campaign, the king went on hunting expeditions.

Besides being a passionate soldier and hunter, Tukulti-Ninurta apparently also had certain intellectual interests. This is suggested by the fact that he is the first Assyrian king whom the “Synchronistic King List” associates with a chief scholar, a certain Gabbu-ilani-ereš, who was the ancestor of an influential family of scribes and royal advisors (RIA 6, 119, iii 16–17; PNA 1/ II, 414 (H. Hunger and K. Radner)).

The reign of Tukulti-Ninurta’s son Aššurnaširpal (Assyrian: Aššur-nāšir-apli) II (883–859) marks the beginning of the second phase of the Reconquista period, during which Assyria established herself irrevocably as the most powerful state in Western Asia.⁶ Aššurnaširpal was a relentless warrior, who described his military actions at great length in numerous royal inscriptions. In the east, he conducted three campaigns against Zamua in the Zagros mountains; in the north, he fought repeatedly against Nairi and Urartu, with the city of Tušḫan on the Upper Tigris serving as his local headquarters; and in the west, he was engaged almost continually in battles with several Aramaic and Neo-Hittite kingdoms, which, perhaps prompted by the persistent Assyrian pressure, had morphed into well-organized states by the time of his accession (Fales 2011). The Assyrian king acted with great brutality, liberally described in his inscriptions. In an often quoted account about the conquest of the city of Tela in the Upper Tigris region in 882, Aššurnaširpal reports (RIMA 2: 201):

I captured many troops alive. From some I cut off their arms and hands; from others I cut out off their noses, ears, and *extremities* ... I hung their heads on trees around the city. I burnt their adolescent boys and girls. I razed, destroyed, burnt and consumed the city.

The kingdom of Bit-Adini, with its capital Til-Barsip on the eastern bank of the Euphrates, proved a particularly dangerous enemy to Aššurnaširpal, repeatedly stirring up trouble in the lands along the Khabur and the Middle Euphrates. It took several years of warfare before its king, Aḫuni, accepted Assyrian hegemony and became a vassal. Aḫuni’s submission – which was not final – meant that, for the first time since the reign of Aššur-bel-kala, the lands west of the Euphrates were again open to Assyrian attacks, and Aššurnaširpal seized the opportunity to show his strength. In the course of his ninth campaign, he marched to the Mediterranean, collecting tribute from

many of the kingdoms his army passed. Carchemish, Patina, and the Phoenician cities Tyre, Sidon, Byblos, and Arwad paid large amounts of silver and other precious metals to keep the king from assaulting them (Bagg 2011: 192–4). But to gain full control of the region, many more campaigns were in store for the Assyrians. After rebellions by Bit-Adini and Carchemish, Aššurnaširpal spent the last years of his reign on fruitless attempts to bring them back into the fold.

Aššurnaširpal used the booty and tribute amassed by his predecessors and himself to sponsor building activities in various Assyrian cities, including Nineveh, Ashur, and Imgur-Enlil (Balawat). His most ambitious construction project, however, took shape in Kalḫu, a dilapidated town on the east bank of the Tigris in central Assyria (Oates and Oates 2001). Having decided in 879 that Kalḫu should henceforth serve as the main residence of the Assyrian kings, Aššurnaširpal employed thousands of Assyrian corvée workers and deportees to build several massive palaces and temples in the city and fortify its citadel. Gigantic bull colossi made of stone were placed as guardians in the entrances of the king's new Northwest Palace, and long rows of stone orthostats with depictions of military and religious scenes lined its walls. Both the colossi and the orthostats are today considered as emblematic of Neo-Assyrian monumental art, even though they seem to have had Neo-Hittite and Middle Assyrian predecessors (on the influence of Neo-Hittite culture on Assyria, see Novák et al. 2004; on possible Middle Assyrian “forerunners,” Orlamünde and Lundström 2011).

In 864, Aššurnaširpal celebrated the completion of the palace by inviting, according to one of his inscriptions, no fewer than 69,574 guests, among them 16,000 citizens of Kalḫu and 5,000 foreign dignitaries, and providing them over a period of ten days with 10,000 pigeons, 10,000 jugs of beer, and 10,000 skins of wine, along with numerous other foods and beverages (RIMA 2: 288–93; Finet 1992). Even though the city of Ashur remained the religious heart of Assyria – the place where the Assyrian kings stayed for several weeks in the spring to participate in important religious festivals and where they were buried after they died (see RIA 11: 146–52 (P. Miglus); Maul 2000; Lundström 2009) – and despite the fact that the kings also spent considerable amounts of time in Nineveh, the royal court and the central institutions of the Assyrian government were now primarily situated in Kalḫu, and remained there for the next 150 years.

Aššurnaširpal may have had two main reasons for the revolutionary step of creating a new Assyrian capital. First, Kalḫu was situated in the middle of the “Assyrian triangle” formed by Ashur, Nineveh, and Arbela, a much more central location than that of Ashur in the far south (Radner 2011). And second, by moving to Kalḫu, Aššurnaširpal may have hoped to become more independent from the great families of Ashur, who had been quite influential until then. Revealingly, the king made a eunuch, a certain Nergal-apil-kumu’a,

overseer of Kalḫu, and not a member of the old aristocracy. Eunuchs were deemed to be devoted to the king alone and not to their own families. They became increasingly powerful in the course of the next 250 years, serving as generals, provincial governors, drivers of the royal chariot, royal cooks, bakers, cup-bearers, palace guards, scribes, diplomats, and in many other functions (Deller 1999).

Another possible sign of the diminished influence of the traditional elites is that several queens of later Assyrian kings bore West Semitic names, suggesting that they did not originate from old Assyrian families. In contrast, Aššurnaširpal's own principal wife, Mullissu-mukannišat-Ninua, was the daughter of an Assyrian aristocrat, Aššur-nirka-da'in, who served as the king's Chief Cupbearer; her richly furnished tomb has been discovered at Kalḫu (PNA 2/III: 767 (H. D. Baker)).

Shalmaneser (Assyrian: Salmānu-ašarēd) III (858–824), Aššurnaširpal's son and successor, continued the aggressive military politics of his father and managed to considerably widen Assyria's geopolitical horizons.⁷ The territories on the Khabur and the Middle Euphrates were now firmly under Assyrian control, but Aḫuni of Bit-Adini, who enjoyed the support of various other states in northern Syria, continued to offer fierce resistance. It took several campaigns before, in the winter of 857/56, Til-Barsip, Bīt-Adini's capital, finally surrendered. Shalmaneser visited the city the following summer, named it Kar-Salmanu-ašared ("emporium of Shalmaneser"), settled Assyrians in it, and made it the center of a new Assyrian province placed under the command of his Chief Marshal. Provinces administered by Assyrian "magnates" were also created in other sectors of the Assyrian frontier that were vulnerable to attack.

A new powerful enemy threatening Shalmaneser's ambitions had arisen during the ninth century in the form of the kingdom of Urartu, whose center lay in the Lake Van region in Anatolia (Kroll et al. 2012). Urartu's political system, religion, and culture were all based on Assyrian models. The Urartian kings ruled in the same autocratic manner as their Assyrian colleagues; their principal god, Ḫaldi, closely resembled Assur; and the writing system used in Urartu was imported from Assyria. Later, the Assyrians, in turn, adopted some Urartian customs: the cavalry units introduced under Shalmaneser III were probably inspired by Urartian horseback riders, and it is possible that the encounter with Urartu also had an impact on Assyrian irrigation technology and the increasing wine consumption among members of the Assyrian elite (Radner 2011).

Even though Assyria and Urartu were separated by the Taurus mountain range and a number of buffer states such as Kumme, Šubria, and Mušašir, their aggressive expansionism led, before long, to an extended period of military clashes between the two states. There had been skirmishes with Urartu already under Aššurnaširpal II, but the situation got more serious after Shalmaneser

had ascended the throne.

As early as 859, the king felt the need to destroy an Urartian fortress that threatened the land of Gilzanu, a staunch Assyrian ally in western Iran. Three years later, Shalmaneser attacked Urartu from the west, after a long and laborious march through mountainous territory to the sources of the Euphrates. The unsuspecting Urartian king Arramu was forced to leave his royal city Arzaškun to the marauding Assyrian troops, and Shalmaneser devastated the region between Lake Van and Lake Urmia before moving into western Iran and finally returning home to the city of Arbela, completing one of the most ambitious military campaigns of Assyrian history.

The campaign did not fail to also leave a deep impression on a number of states in northern Syria. Sam'al, Patina, Bit-Agusi, Ḫalman (Aleppo), and Carchemish all paid tribute. Nonetheless, Shalmaneser proved unable to take full control of the region west of the Euphrates. In 853, Assyrian troops faced the armies of a massive coalition of western states in the vicinity of the city of Qarqar on the Orontes river. The coalition was led by Hadad-ezer, king of Damascus, and included, among others, king Irḫuleni of Hamath, king Ahab of Israel, and a certain Gindibu', a leader of the Arabs who supplied the allied forces with 1000 camels. The references to the latter two in the inscription on Shalmaneser's "Kurkh monolith" constitute the earliest available attestations of named Israelite and Arab rulers. Even though Shalmaneser claims that the battle of Qarqar ended with a great victory for himself (RIMA 3: 23–4), he probably achieved a stalemate at best. The Assyrians did not make any substantial political or territorial gains.

In 851 and 850 Shalmaneser turned his attention to the south and helped the Babylonian ruler Marduk-zakir-šumi defeat his rebellious brother, Marduk-bel-usati. After successfully completing this mission, the Assyrian king visited the great temples of Babylon, Borsippa, and Kutha and fought on behalf of his Babylonian ally against Chaldaean strongholds in the Mesopotamian south. Babylon, as pointed out before, was an important fountainhead of Assyrian culture and religion, and Shalmaneser was proud of the good relationship he had with Marduk-zakir-šumi. A depiction on the stone base of his throne in his residence in Kalḫu shows the king shaking hands with his Babylonian colleague (Miglus 2000a).

During the 840s and 830s, Shalmaneser undertook a number of additional campaigns in Syria, with armies that included, at one point, no fewer than 120,000 soldiers according to royal inscriptions (RIMA 3: 47; see also [Figure 8.1](#)). The results of these attacks were initially fairly modest, but, in 841, after the death of Hadad-ezer of Damascus, several western rulers, among them Irḫuleni of Hamath and Jehu, the new king of Israel, sent tribute to Assyria. Jehu's submission is depicted on Shalmaneser's "Black Obelisk," which also reveals that an unnamed king of Egypt brought the Assyrian king presents, among them camels, elephants, and monkeys (RIMA 3: 150). On three

occasions between 841 and 837, Assyrian troops laid siege on Damascus, now ruled by a new king, Hazael, but did not manage to conquer the city.

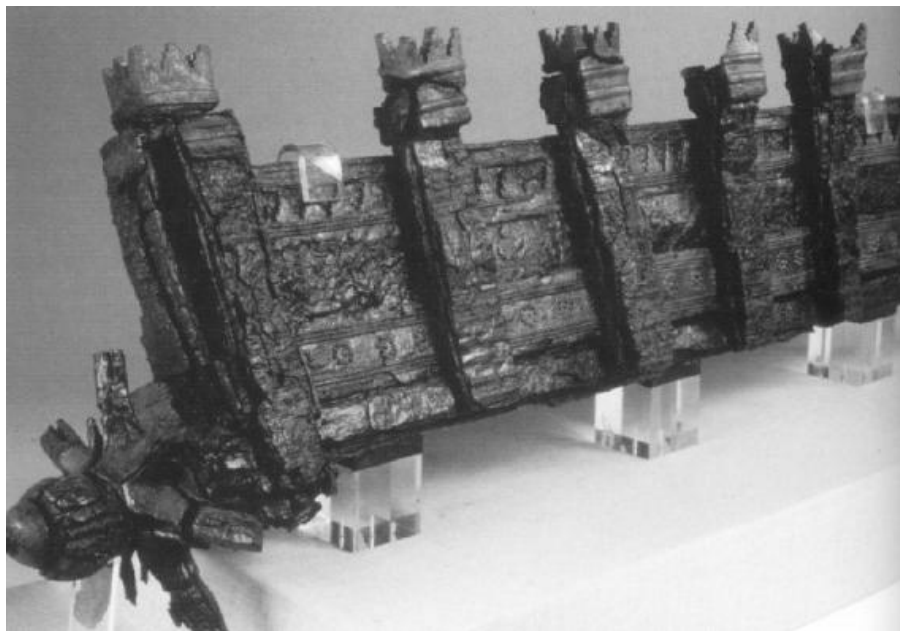


Figure 8.1 Metal brazier with turrets and wheels. The king, while keeping warm, would gaze at what looked like a conquered city on fire. Kalḫu, Fort Shalmaneser, Neo-Assyrian period.

Source: British School of Archaeology in Iraq.

Shalmaneser's failure to fully consolidate Assyrian power in the west was in part the result of an expansion that occurred too quickly, and in too large a territory, to yield sustainable results. The king's military actions ranged from campaigns against Namri in the Kermanshah region in western Iran to assaults on Que in Cilicia. In 836, in the course of a campaign against Tabal in central Anatolia, Shalmaneser advanced as far as Ḫubušna, modern Karahüyük in Cappadocia, one of the most westernmost points ever reached by an Assyrian army. Shalmaneser spread the fear of Assur all over Western Asia, but, since he lacked the means to create stable political structures, his grip on Cilicia, southwestern Syria, and western Iran remained tenuous (Bagg 2011: 194–205).

Assyria's standing deteriorated when, towards the end of Shalmaneser's reign, Urartu made a political comeback. An Assyrian campaign in 830 did not fully quell the renewed threat posed by this enemy. Remarkably, Shalmaneser's inscriptions point out that the army that fought in 830 was led not by the king himself, but by his long-serving Chief Marshal, Dayyan-Aššur, who is credited with heading several campaigns in the following years as well

(Siddall 2013: 104–6, see also Frahm 2015a). Since Assyrian royal inscriptions usually do not mention the names of royal officials, the explicit references to Dayyan-Aššur strongly suggest that the latter had amassed great power – possibly because Shalmaneser was now an old man and no longer fully in charge.

Shalmaneser's increasing inability to rule led to an internal crisis that erupted in full in 826, when one of the king's sons, Aššur-da'in-aplu, turned against his father, instigating a civil war. Even though the exact details of the episode remain murky, there is every reason to assume that Aššur-da'in-aplu's defection was motivated by his father's decision to deprive him of his role as heir apparent and replace him with a younger son, on whom he bestowed the royal name Šamši-Adad (V). It is possible that Šamši-Adad, perhaps a minor during the period of unrest, was originally a puppet of the influential Dayyan-Aššur, who may have wished to move Aššur-da'in-aplu out of the way because he feared the latter would strip him of his power once he ascended the throne.

Even though Aššur-da'in-aplu was supported by a sizable number of Assyrian provinces and cities, among them Ashur and Nineveh, and despite the fact that Dayyan-Aššur died during the early stages of the conflict, Šamši-Adad eventually prevailed and, in 824, ascended the Assyrian throne. In the four years that followed he managed to defeat all his domestic opponents, not the least, it seems, because he received help from the Babylonian king Marduk-zakir-šumi (Fuchs 2008: 64–8). Things, however, were no longer as they had been before. Dayyan-Aššur's prominent role in the last years of Shalmaneser's reign marked the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Assyria, a chapter in which Assyrian “magnates,” and not the Assyrian kings, were the dominant actors in the political arena.

Internal Conflicts and Fragmentation of Power: The Age of the “Magnates” (823–745)

The number of Assyrian royal inscriptions available for the period from 823 to 745 is significantly smaller than the respective corpus from the previous era. This decrease should not be ascribed, primarily, to the chances of discovery (for a different view, see Siddall 2013: 11–59) but rather to the aforementioned changes in the Assyrian power structure, brought about by the rise of the magnates, a small group of Assyrian generals and court officials who became highly influential during this time, at the expense of the authority of the Assyrian kings (Grayson 1993; Mattila 2000).

The consequences of this power shift remain debated. Some scholars, among them F. Blocher (2001), S. Dalley (2000), and, most recently, L. Siddall

(2013: 81–132), believe that it did not substantially compromise Assyria's preeminent political status in Western Asia and may even have strengthened it in some respects. Blocher (2001) claims that the governors of the western provinces produced some positive change during the period in question, for example by developing agricultural land between the Khabur and Euphrates rivers, while Dalley (2000), pointing to the role of the Middle Assyrian "king of Ḫanigalbat," argues that the increased agency of these governors was nothing entirely new. A different interpretation of the situation is provided by A. Fuchs (2008), who considers the "age of the magnates" as one of decline. Fuchs's assessment is based in part on comparison with other historical periods, such as late imperial China, that saw the rise of high officials and eunuchs at the expense of central power.

The present writer acknowledges that, during the period in question, Assyria's territorial expansion did not continue in the same dramatic fashion that had characterized the reign of Shalmaneser III, and that Assyria suffered several years of internal strife in its course; but he also believes that the Assyrian state remained, overall, largely unscathed by these developments – otherwise, Tiglath-pileser III, who brought the age of the magnates to an end, would not have been able to enlarge the Assyrian territory as rapidly as he did in the eighteen years of his reign. Since none of the magnates ever assumed the title "king," no major crisis of legitimacy occurred, and the steps the magnates and provincial governors took, using their greater independence, to develop stronger economic and military structures in the territories they controlled ultimately benefitted Tiglath-pileser's newly centralized government and its expansive policies. Thus, Fuchs's claim that Assyria experienced a massive decline during the age of the magnates cannot be accepted – which does not, however, compromise the overall importance of his 2008 account of the political history of this period.

Under Šamši-Adad V (823–811),⁸ some of the magnates began to keep their offices over longer periods of time, in contrast to earlier practices. Two men who may have supported the king during the civil war that preceded his reign became particularly influential: the Field Marshal Yaḥalu and Nergal-ila'i, a provincial governor who later became Field Marshal as well.

The earliest military campaigns described in Šamši-Adad's inscriptions, which were against western Iran and a number of Urartian fortresses, were apparently rather limited in scope. One of them was led by the king's Chief Eunuch, a newly created position. Šamši-Adad's third campaign against the Zagros region may have ended with an Assyrian defeat at the hands of Bit-Ḫamban and Namri, and in northern Syria, where the Assyrians had not campaigned since 829, a number of kings began to withhold their tribute, if we are to believe an inscription of Šamši-Adad's successor Adad-nirari III (RIMA 3: 208–9). That things were difficult for the new king is also indicated by the fact that, in 817/816, Šamši-Adad had to quell a rebellion in Tillê

within the Assyrian core area.

In the last years of his reign, however, from 815 until his death in 811, Šamši-Adad's military endeavors became more successful. They were primarily directed against the Babylonian king Marduk-balassu-iqbi and his Aramaean, Chaldaean, and Elamite allies, bringing a period of fairly peaceful relations between Assyria and the south to an end. Disregarding the terms of the humiliating treaty he had been forced to conclude with Marduk-balassu-iqbi's predecessor Marduk-zakir-šumi during his fight for the crown, Šamši-Adad ruthlessly assaulted regions northeast of the Tigris that were under Babylonian control. In 813, he defeated Marduk-balassu-iqbi and brought him to Nineveh. Likewise carried away to Assyria were a number of divine statues from Der, an act of "godnapping" typical of Assyria's aggressive foreign policies (Zaia 2015). One year later, Šamši-Adad prevailed in battle over Marduk-balassu-iqbi's successor Babu-aḥu-iddin, moved into central Babylonia, and established new borders with his southern neighbor. Even though the Assyrian king claims that he showed respect for the Babylonian cults and made sacrifices to the gods of Kutha, Babylon, and Borsippa, it seems that he left Babylonia in a state of disarray. The Babylonian throne remained vacant for several years.

When Šamši-Adad V died in 811, his son and successor Adad-nirari III (r. 810–783) was probably still a minor.⁹ Even though not explicitly stated in the sources, it is likely that the real power lay initially with Adad-nirari's Field Marshal Nergal-ila'i and the king's mother, Sammu-ramat (Pettinato 1985; Siddall 2013: 86–100; Frahm 2016). How much authority Sammu-ramat held is revealed by a stela from the year 805 that mentions both her and Adad-nirari as guarantors of the border between the Assyrian vassal states of Gurgum and Kummuḥ in southern Anatolia (RIMA 3: 204–5). The queen mother and her royal son are also mentioned together on a pair of statues dedicated to the god Nabû by Bel-tarši-ilumma, the governor of Kalḥu. Sammu-ramat is, moreover, the first Assyrian woman commemorated on one of the stelae set up in rows at Ashur to honor the memory of Assyrian eponyms and rulers (RIMA 3, 226–7). That a woman, albeit not *de iure*, managed to gain so much political influence in Assyria was unprecedented and led to the emergence of numerous legends around her in later years (see below, "The Afterlife and Legacy of the Assyrian Empire").

Even after the death of Sammu-ramat, probably some time around 798, Adad-nirari's power remained limited. The new strong man, it seems, was the eunuch Nergal(or: Palil?)-ereš, who controlled the entire Assyrian territory on the Middle Euphrates and in the Khabur region from ca. 797 to 787 (Radner 2012; Siddall 2013: 106–18).

Militarily, Assyria achieved some successes during Adad-nirari's reign, notably in western Iran, where Assyrian troops undertook no fewer than thirteen campaigns between 809 and 787. Only four campaigns, in contrast,

were directed against the west, where Adad-nirari scored a victory over Aram-Damascus (Weippert 1992). In the south, the situation remained chaotic, with marauding Aramaic tribes, among them Itu'eans, adding to the insecurity. The year 790 saw the first Assyrian campaign against these new enemies, who wreaked havoc in the Assyro-Babylonian border regions.

Around 787, Adad-nirari nominated a certain Šamši-ilu, whose family background remains unknown, as Field Marshal (see PNA 3/II, 1226 (R. Mattila); RIA 11, 639–40 (H. D. Baker); Siddall 2013: 118–27). The new appointee held this office for roughly forty years, during which he seems to have become the principal wielder of power in Assyria. Shalmaneser IV, Aššur-dan III, and Aššur-nirari V, the three Assyrian kings who successively ascended the Assyrian throne after Adad-nirari's death in 783, apparently had little agency, as indicated by the remarkably small corpus of royal inscriptions they left. Šamši-ilu, in contrast, felt entitled to create his own inscriptions and to present himself more and more openly as the real mover and shaker. In the so-called Antakya stela from the last years of the reign of Adad-nirari III, Šamši-ilu still mentions the king, but in later texts, he claims to have acted completely on his own (Fuchs 2008: 79).

With the rise of Šamši-ilu, the focus of Assyrian campaigning shifted from Media and other eastern territories to the border region with Urartu, which Assyrian troops attacked several times between 786 and 784. In 783, 782, and 777, the Assyrian army had to fight Aramaean brigands roaming the Assyro-Babylonian border region, but the main challenge remained the conflict with Urartu. In 774, Šamši-ilu led his soldiers in western Iran against the Urartian king Argišti I and won an important victory, which he celebrated, in royal style, in a text inscribed on two colossal stone lions discovered at Til-Barsip (RIMA 3: 231–3).

During this time, a new Assyrian monarch, Shalmaneser IV (r. 782–773), was in office,¹⁰ but Šamši-ilu felt no need to give him any credit for the military victories and building activities described in his inscriptions from Til-Barsip. Instead, he claimed for himself the title “governor of Ḫatti and of Guti(um),” suggesting that his sphere of influence stretched far and wide both in the east and the west. In actuality, however, he was apparently not yet entirely in charge. Another magnate who assumed traditionally royal prerogatives under Shalmaneser IV was the Palace Herald Bel-Ḫarran-bel-ušur (Siddall 2013: 127–8). In a stela found at Tell Abta on the Wadi Tharthar, Bel-Ḫarran-bel-ušur records the foundation of the city of Dur-Bel-Ḫarran-bel-ušur, named after himself, and claims that he – and not the king – had established tax exemptions for it (RIMA 3: 241–42).

The last significant event of the reign of Shalmaneser IV was Šamši-ilu's 773 campaign against Damascus, whose ruler sent Shalmaneser not only rich tribute, but also one of his own daughters as a prospective wife. From the reign of Shalmaneser's successor Aššur-dan III (772–755), only a single short

royal inscription has survived, describing reconstruction work on the Aššur temple (RIMA 3: 245–46). The Eponym Chronicles mention a campaign against Ḫatarikka in the Levant in 772 and minor military actions against Aramaeans in the south in the following years, none of them, apparently, particularly noteworthy. In all likelihood, Šamši-ilu became even more powerful during this time. As pointed out by Fuchs (2008, 84–5), the eponyms who served under Aššur-dan III include Šamši-ilu, the king, and a number of provincial governors, but no longer the Chief Cupbearer, the Palace Herald, and the *masennu*-official, suggesting that Šamši-ilu had by now sidelined these three particularly powerful magnates.

For the year 763, the Eponym Chronicles record not only the occurrence of a solar eclipse (see above, “Chronology and Sources”), but also the beginnings of a massive rebellion that broke out in various Assyrian cities, apparently including Ashur (but see Fuchs 2008: 86), Arrapha, and Guzana in the west. The uprising was most likely directed against Šamši-ilu, whose *de facto* rule many must have considered illegitimate. When Šamši-ilu, in 758, finally defeated his opponents, Assyria, weakened by years of civil war, was in dire straits – the Eponym Chronicles mention that there had been a widespread plague or famine in 759 and that the Assyrian army did not undertake any military actions in 757 and 756.

In 755, a new king, Aššur-nirari V, yet another son of Adad-nirari III, came to the Assyrian throne.¹¹ Initially, Aššur-nirari’s accession seems to have led to a certain stabilization of Assyria’s political situation. The Chief Cupbearer, the Palace Herald, and the *masennu* served again as eponyms, and the Assyrian army undertook a successful campaign against Arpad in northwestern Syria in 754. Mati’ilu, Arpad’s king, was forced to sign a treaty with Aššur-nirari, in which he acknowledged his vassalage (SAA 2: no. 2). But soon after Assyria’s military fortunes took another turn for the worse. The Urartian king Sarduri II won an important battle against the Assyrians, celebrated in one of his inscriptions, and the Eponym Chronicles report that the Assyrian army had to stay home between 753 and 750 and again in 747. To what extent paralysis had seized the Assyrian state can be gauged from the fact that not a single royal inscription survives from the reign of Aššur-nirari (for a royal decree from this period, see RIMA 3: 246–7). What we have instead from the middle of the eighth century is a group of inscriptions written in the name of various “governors” of Suḫi and Mari on the Middle Euphrates (RIMB 2: 275–331). They suggest that these men were essentially independent and able to direct their affairs without any serious interference from Assyria.

At some point between 752 and 745, Šamši-ilu seems to have died. We do not know whether he played any role in the events of 746, when another major revolt broke out in Kalḫu. Besides a short reference in the Eponym Chronicles, we have hardly any information on how this revolt unfolded – but

it is clear that it changed the political playing field completely. King Aššur-nirari was probably killed, and on Ayyaru 13, 745, yet another son of Adad-nirari III ascended the Assyrian throne: a certain Pulu, who might previously have served as governor of Kalḫu.¹² He assumed the throne name Tiglath-pileser (Assyrian: Tukulti-apil-Ešarra) (III) and ushered in an entirely new era.

Genesis of an Empire: Assyria from Tiglath-pileser III to Sargon II (744–705)

With the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, our sources begin to flow more abundantly again. Tiglath-pileser left a significant number of royal inscriptions, collected in RINAP 1 (see also Tadmor 1994). They include the king's (unfortunately badly preserved) "annals," written on sculpted stone slabs decorating his palace in Kalḫu and describing in great detail the king's military exploits between 745 and 729, as well as various stelae, statues, rock reliefs, and clay tablets. Tiglath-pileser is, moreover, the earliest Neo-Assyrian king from whose reign we have significant numbers of administrative texts and letters sent to the court by state officials, spies, and other correspondents (for the letters, see SAA 19: 1–151). He is also the first Assyrian ruler to be mentioned in the Babylonian Chronicle series and the Hebrew Bible (see [Chapters 28–9](#)), texts that provide us with outside perspectives of the history of his reign.¹³

Tiglath-pileser would not have been able to ascend the Assyrian throne without the help of a number of important military leaders and high officials, including Bel-Ḫarran-bel-ušur, whom the new king reappointed as Palace Herald (Fuchs 2008: 95). But, once in power, Tiglath-pileser took important steps to reduce the influence of the magnates. The large territories previously controlled by them were divided into smaller units that were placed under the authority of provincial governors loyal to the crown. From now on, Assyrian high officials and military officers, as a rule, no longer had the right to commission inscriptions written in their own names (for a possible exception, see Balcioglu and Mayer 2006), and it is noteworthy that the latest stelae from Ashur that commemorate the names of eponyms date to the mid-eighth century (Millard 1994: 12). The powerful magnate Šamši-ilu was subjected to *damnatio memoriae* – his name and titles seem to have been deliberately erased from his lion inscriptions from Til-Barsip.

Tiglath-pileser's reign is characterized by a series of major military campaigns in all directions, beginning in his accession year with assaults on Babylonian territories on the east side of the Tigris. One year later, the Assyrians created two new provinces in the Zagros region, Parsua and Bit-Ḫamban. Between 743 and 739, Assyrian campaigns focused on Urartu and the unruly city-states

of northern Syria. The greatest triumphs of this period were the defeat, in 743, of the Urartian king Sarduri II, who had to flee on a mare to save his life, and the conquest and annexation, in 740, of the strategically important city of Arpad, which had been under siege for three years.

In the following years, Tiglath-pileser began to penetrate regions further southwest, beyond the Euphrates, that had never been fully controlled by Assyria before. In 738, Assyrian armies defeated and annexed Unqi (Pattin) in northern Syria, as well as Šimirra and Ḫatarikka in the region between Hamath and the Mediterranean. In 732, they occupied Damascus, Galilee, and Transjordan. These latter conquests severely reduced the size of the kingdom of Israel, vindicating predictions of impending doom made a little earlier by the Biblical prophet Amos. Already two years before, in 734, an Assyrian army had reached the Egyptian border, forcing numerous states in the Levant, including Judah, Ammon, Moab, and Edom, to become Assyrian vassals and pay a heavy tribute (Bagg 2011: 213–6; Dubovský 2006b).

At some point during these years, Tiglath-pileser made a woman with the apparently West Semitic name of Yabâ (“the beautiful one”) his principal wife. Her lavish tomb was discovered in 1989 by Iraqi archaeologists under the pavement of a room of the Northwest Palace at Nimrud/Kalḫu (Curtis 2008). S. Dalley (2008) has surmised that Yabâ was a Judean princess, but this remains highly uncertain (see Frahm 2014: 182–8, with further literature).

A salient feature of Tiglath-pileser’s military policies were the mass deportations he undertook in territories occupied by his armies (Oded 1979, esp. 20). Even though the numbers the king provides in his inscriptions may often be exaggerated (De Odorico 1995: esp. 100–3, 170–1, 198), there is little doubt that he exiled tens and perhaps even hundreds of thousands of people, often replacing them with ethnic groups from other regions under Assyrian control. The practice of mass deportation, which was continued under later Assyrian kings, had two main goals: to destroy the identity of the colonized polities and thus reduce the potential for armed resistance; and to enable the Assyrian king to send large numbers of laborers wherever they were most needed, whether in underdeveloped provinces to do agricultural work, or in the Assyrian capital cities to participate in large construction projects. The deportations of the Late Assyrian period changed the ethnolinguistic composition of Western Asia forever, diluting the region’s cultural diversity and enhancing the rise of Aramaic as *lingua franca*. There is little doubt that the deportations were often devastating for the affected populations, but it is important to keep in mind that, unlike certain mass deportations in modern times, they were not aimed at killing large numbers of civilians.

During the last years of his reign, Tiglath-pileser shifted his attention towards Babylonia, where conflicts between traditionally minded urban elites, Chaldaean strong men, and Aramaean tribes had led to a highly volatile

situation (Berlejung and Streck 2013). Some twenty letters from Kalḫu sent to Tiglath-pileser by his agents in Babylonia (see SAA 19: XXVIII–XXXIII), and a cache of contemporary Neo-Babylonian letters from Nippur (Cole 1996: esp. nos. 6, 16–18, 21–2, 97), cast light on the events in the south. In 731, Mukin-zeri, a leader of the Chaldaean Bit-Amukani “tribe,” had seized the Babylonian throne. Tiglath-pileser considered this an assault on Assyrian interests. In 729, he attacked and defeated Mukin-zeri and assumed the title “king of Babylon.” Well aware of the fact that Babylon, despite all its political troubles, had remained an extremely important religious and cultural center that was now on the verge of a slow but steady economic recovery, and eager to win the hearts and minds of the citizens of Babylon, Tiglath-pileser twice participated in the Akitu festival that was celebrated in the city at the beginning of the new year in honor of the Babylonian god Marduk. Campaigns against Chaldaean strongholds in the south consolidated Assyria’s rule over Babylonia.

Towards the end of his reign, Tiglath-pileser could claim that he had more than doubled the territories dominated by Assyria. Particularly in the west, Tiglath-pileser had created a significant number of new provinces, often by dividing previously independent states into two units (Radner 2006–08: 56–63; Bagg 2012: 213–26). The king’s preference for direct rule, which replaced indirect control through vassal kings in many cases, led to some important changes in the way the Assyrian state accumulated wealth. Booty (*ḫubtu/šallutu*) seized from enemies and tribute (*biltul/maddattu*) received from vassals still played a role, as did “presents” (*nāmurtu/tāmartu*) sent by political allies; but with the establishment of so many additional provinces, Assyria’s central government became more and more dependent on taxes, which were levied on people, cattle, agricultural produce, and trade, and collected by provincial governors (Radner 2007). The new system reduced the need for military intervention, but increased administrative costs.

The enormous size the Assyrian state had reached by 729 and its even larger sphere of influence (see [Figure 8.2](#)), the complex mechanisms of political and economical control established throughout the realm, the state’s multi-ethnic and multi-lingual character, and the osmotic imbalance between center and periphery – all these features justify calling Assyria, from the time of Tiglath-pileser onwards, an empire *stricto sensu*, possibly the first empire in world history (Bagg 2011: 271–308; Radner 2014), even though defining empire is, of course, a notoriously problematic affair (Howe 2002: 9–34; Morris and Scheidel 2009) and despite the fact that other scholars consider not Assyria but Akkad, the state founded by king Sargon in ca. 2300 BCE, “the first world empire” (Liverani 1993) or locate the birth of empire in 18th Dynasty Egypt (ca. 1550–1390 BCE) (e.g., Van De Mieroop 2011: 151–83).

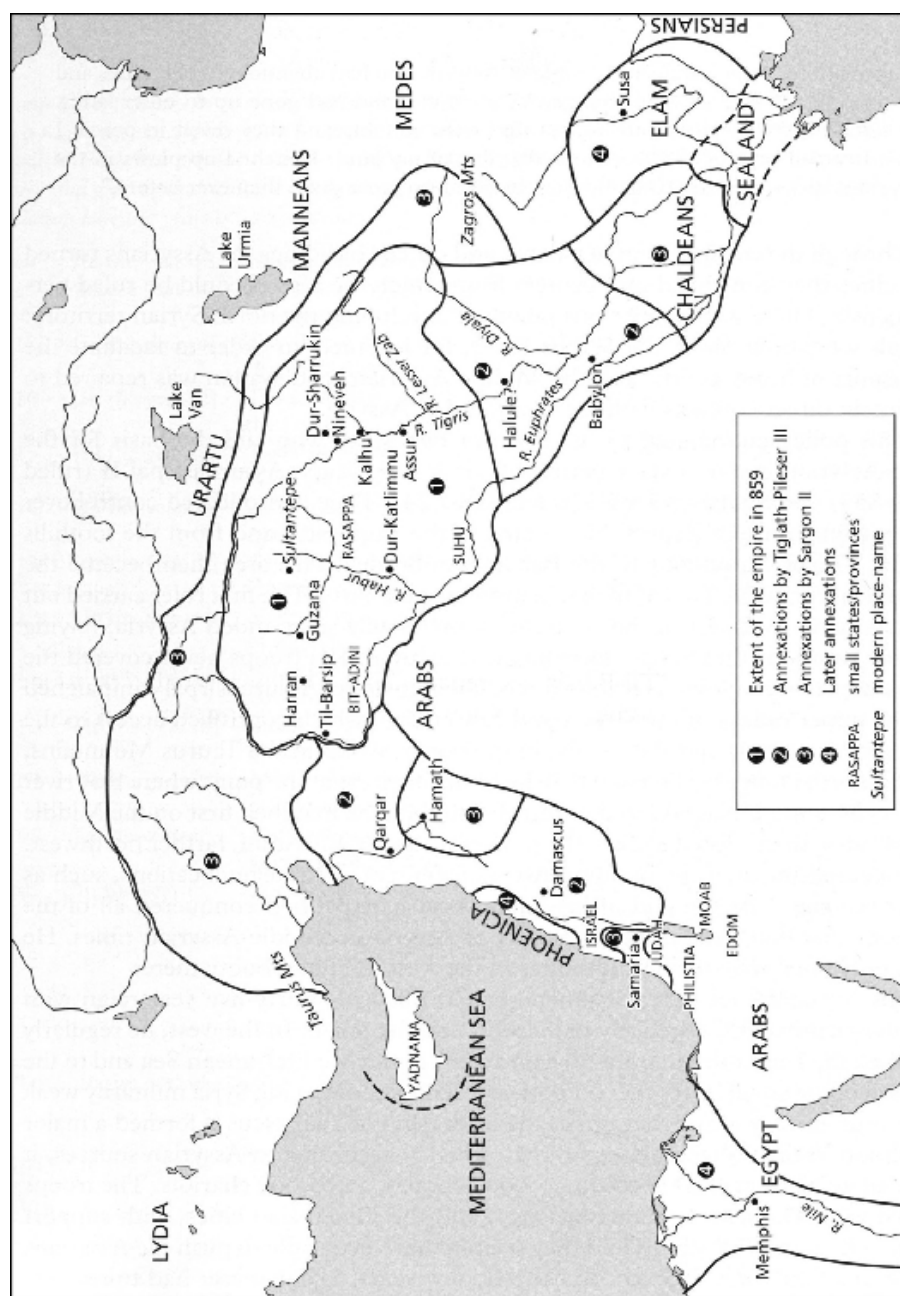


Figure 8.2 Map illustrating the various stages of the expansion of the Neo-Assyrian state.

Source: Wiley.

The Assyrian “empire” served, directly or indirectly, as a model for the succeeding imperial states of Western Asia, from the Babylonian and Persian empires of antiquity to the Abbasid and Ottoman states of the Islamic period

(see [Chapter 27](#)). This invests Late Assyrian history with a world-historical dimension, and it is hence quite fitting, and probably not by chance, that both the Hebrew Bible (see [Chapter 29](#)) and classical sources (see [Chapter 30](#)) preserved a memory of Assyria, while essentially ignoring earlier Mesopotamian history.

In some respects, Assyrian imperialism was different from later forms of imperial rule. Most importantly, the Assyrian kings did not actively promote their religion and culture. The Assyrian state god Assur (Lambert 1983; Holloway 2002; Berlejung 2007; von der Osten-Sacken 2010) had no regular cult outside Assyria, and the Neo-Assyrian language (Hämeen-Anttila 2000), which was spoken in Assyria's core areas, served as an "official language" among provincial administrators, but was not imposed on the populations of the newly conquered territories. Even within Assyria itself, Neo-Assyrian was, in fact, increasingly replaced by a new vernacular, Aramaic, a language that owed its growing importance initially to the eastward migration of Aramaean population groups and then to the mass deportations undertaken by several Neo-Assyrian kings (Oded 1979; Lipiński 2000; Beaulieu 2006: 191–6).

One of the greatest problems the Assyrian empire faced from the time of Tiglath-pileser onwards was its relationship with Babylonia (see [Chapter 15](#)). The Late Assyrian kings, aware that many features of their culture and religion were based on Babylonian models, were willing to grant Babylonia a special status, but expected in return from their southern neighbor a basic acceptance of their political domination. When the Babylonians, in the decades following Tiglath-pileser's reign, sought repeatedly to shake off the Assyrian yoke, relations with the south became increasingly sour.

The problems with Babylonia, however, did not start right away. During the short reign of Tiglath-pileser's son and successor Ululayu, who ruled from 727 to 722 and assumed the throne name Shalmaneser (V), the situation in the south remained largely stable.¹⁴

Before his accession, Ululayu had served as Tiglath-pileser's crown prince, as indicated by a number of letters written by him to his father during this period (Radner 2003/04), and his rise to power was apparently smooth. The new king focused his attention on Syria and the Levant, like the earlier kings Shalmaneser I and III, whose name Ululayu may have chosen for that very reason. Towards the end of his reign, he seems to have conquered Samaria, the capital of the kingdom of Israel. He may also have annexed Sam'al in northern Syria and Que in Cilicia, even though this remains debated (Becking 1992: 21–60, Fuchs 1998: 84–5, Bagg 2011: 227–32). Unfortunately, our information on all these events comes exclusively from later sources and non-Assyrian texts such as the Babylonian Chronicle and the Hebrew Bible. We

have no royal inscriptions of any significance written in Shalmaneser's name (see RINAP 1: 171–88), and the Assyrian Eponym Chronicles are only fragmentarily preserved for his reign.

In 722, Shalmaneser V was succeeded on the Assyrian throne by a man named Sargon (Assyrian: Šarru-ukin) (II), whose reign has produced a particularly rich set of sources, including numerous royal inscriptions and diplomatic letters.¹⁵ Even though he was apparently a son of Tiglath-pileser III like his predecessor Shalmaneser, Sargon was most probably a usurper. The exact circumstances of his rise to power remain unclear, but there is evidence for massive internal trouble at the beginning of his reign, most prominently in the form of a statement in one of Sargon's inscriptions that the new king deported 6300 "guilty Assyrians," presumably political opponents, to Hamath. Sargon alleged, moreover, that Shalmaneser V had wickedly abolished certain privileges rightfully claimed by the city of Ashur, another indication that he loathed his predecessor and probably deposed him in a coup (for a different view, see Vera Chamaza 1992).

Sargon eventually managed to defeat his domestic opponents and consolidate his position as king, but not before several regions on the edges of the Assyrian empire had begun to use the temporary instability in the center to reclaim their independence. One such rebellion broke out early in 721 in Babylon, where Marduk-aplu-iddina II, the leader of the Chaldaean state of Bit-Yakin, seized the throne and established an alliance with the Elamites in the east, initiating the long series of anti-Assyrian uprisings that occurred in Babylonia during the Late Assyrian period. Sargon reacted by attacking Aramaean tribes supportive of Marduk-aplu-iddina and, in 720, by leading his troops to the city of Der to fight the Elamite king Ḫuban-nikaš I. Yet even though Sargon claims to have prevailed in the battle, he failed to reach his most important objective, the removal of Marduk-aplu-iddina from power. In fact, the Babylonian Chronicle suggests that the Assyrians suffered a defeat at Der.

More success was in store for Sargon in the west, where an uprising initiated by Yau-bi'di of Hamath and supported by Arpad, Šimirra, Damascus, and Samaria threatened to undo the provincial structures established by Tiglath-pileser III and Shalmaneser V. The situation seemed initially grim: going on a killing spree reminiscent of the "Sicilian Vespers" of AD 1282, the insurgents tried to finish off every Assyrian who happened to fall into their hands. But in 720, while Sargon himself campaigned in the east, his generals were able to quell the rebellion (Bagg 2011: 233–6; Frahm 2013). As correctly reported in the Bible (2 Kings 17:6), one of the results of the events was that numerous people from Samaria were deported to Guzana in the Khabur triangle, Ḫalahḫu in central Assyria, and Media in the east. Together with the Israelites exiled by Tiglath-pileser III in 732, they form the "ten lost tribes" of Israel, whose alleged identity with later people of the east has led to much

uninformed speculation throughout the centuries. A few years later, Sargon resettled foreigners from other parts of the empire in Samaria, among them significant numbers of Arabs (Becking 1992: 61–104).

In the two years following his victory over the western alliance, Sargon conducted successful military campaigns against Mannaya in western Iran and Šinuḫtu in Anatolia. In 717, he conquered Carchemish on the Euphrates and took so much silver from the city's treasury that, in the years after, silver began to replace copper as Assyria's main currency (Müller 1997: 120).

The large influx of silver may also have played a role in Sargon's decision, made in the year of the Carchemish campaign, to start construction work on an enormous new capital: a city named Dur-Šarrukin ("Fort Sargon") – today known as Khorsabad – that was built from scratch at the site of the small village of Magganubba some 18 kilometers northeast of Nineveh. A main reason why Sargon wished to move the royal court to a new city might have been that he no longer felt entirely safe in the old capital Kalḫu after the insurgency that had accompanied his rise to the throne (Radner 2011: 325–7). Since the king did not need to take into account any previous buildings, he was free to conceive Dur-Šarrukin as an "ideal city," based on geometric harmony, with a city wall that formed an almost perfect square (Battini 2000). It took Sargon's construction crews, comprising deportees and *corvée* workers, some ten years to finish their work (Parpola 1995). In the end, Dur-Šarrukin covered a surface of some 315 hectares.

Inscriptions from Dur-Šarrukin indicate that Sargon elevated his brother Sîn-aḫḫu-ušur to the influential position of "Grand Vizier" and allowed him to reside in a palace next to his own. The king, it seems, relied increasingly on members of his immediate family, besides Sîn-aḫḫu-ušur also his son (and crown prince) Sennacherib, at the expense of the traditional elites (May 2015).

Between 716 and 713, Sargon's military activities focused on territories in western Iran – from where Assyria received its war horses – and Anatolia. Assyria's main opponent and strategic rival in this region was Urartu, which sought to wrest control over the Iranian buffer state of Mannaya from Assyrian hands. In 714, Sargon scored a major victory when he defeated the Urartian king Rusa I in the region of mount Wauš in the vicinity of Lake Urmia. Assyrian troops marched all around that lake and then back, wreaking havoc in the Urartian core area (but without establishing long-term control) and plundering the temple of the Urartian state god Ḫaldi in Mušašir. The campaign is described at great length and in highly elaborate language in a well-preserved "letter" that Sargon sent to the god Assur after the successful completion of the campaign (Foster 2005: 790–813; Mayer 2012).

While such literary letters are highly exceptional, the royal archives of Nineveh and Kalḫu have yielded some 1200 regular letters sent to Sargon

from all over the empire by his provincial governors, military and civilian officials, and political agents. These letters demonstrate that Assyria's power was not only based on her impressive military machine but also on a widespread network of informants, who would write to the king about the intentions of foreign rulers, movements of enemy troops, important events in Assyrian provinces, and other matters of political interest (Dubovský 2006a). Well-kept roads with numerous postal stations facilitated the speedy delivery of such letters (see SAA 1: XIII–XIV). A letter written to Sargon by his son and crown prince Sennacherib can serve as an example of the messages outside informants sent to the king. The letter quotes a missive from Aššur-rešuwa, an intelligence agent reporting on Urartian affairs who was based in Kumme, a city not far from the Urartian border (SAA 1: no. 31, obv. 21 – rev. 3):

Aššur-rešuwa has written to me (Sennacherib) thus: “The previous report I sent about the Urartians was that they had suffered a terrible defeat (against the Cimmerians). Now his country is quiet again, and each of his magnates has gone to his province. Kaqqadanu, his Field Marshal, has been taken prisoner; the Urartian king is in the province of Wazaun.”

The letter also quotes a number of other reports on the situation in Urartu, written by additional informants. Having recourse to the opinions of a variety of sources allowed the Assyrian king and his advisors to engage in more realistic political decision-making.

Assyria's geographical and cultural horizon widened significantly during the reign of Sargon. In the years between 716 and 713 alone, besides fighting against Urartu, Assyrian troops and their allies conducted campaigns against the Medes in the east, defeated a number of Arab tribes (some of which were resettled in Samaria), attacked Ionian pirates in the eastern Mediterranean, and had encounters in central Anatolia with king Mita of Mušku, whom the Greeks knew as Midas of Phrygia and credited with a legendary “golden touch.” Moreover, in the same years, It'amra, the ruler of Sheba in south Arabia, and Osorkon IV, the ruler of Tanis in Lower Egypt, brought presents to the Assyrian court. Osorkon, it seems, remained on Sargon's side when a certain Yamani led a popular uprising against Assyrian rule in Ashdod on the Mediterranean in 711. As mentioned in Isaiah 20:1, the Assyrian Field Marshal managed to quell the rebellion, Ashdod became an Assyrian province, and, in 707, Yamani was extradited to Assyria by Shebitku, a Nubian ruler of the 25th Egyptian dynasty who had brought Lower Egypt under control a little earlier (Kahn 2001).

During the last years of his reign, Sargon shifted his attention back to Babylonia. The coalition with Elam that had kept the Chaldaean ruler Marduk-aplu-iddina on the Babylonian throne for twelve years had slowly disintegrated, and Sargon faced little resistance when he led his troops

southwards in 710 (SAA 15: XIV–XXII). Marduk-aplu-iddina fled, and the citizens of Babylon opened their gates for Sargon to welcome him, ostensibly with great enthusiasm. Sargon's troops pursued Marduk-aplu-iddina to the city of Dur-Yakin, capital of his ancestral homeland Bit-Yakin, and after prolonged negotiations reached an agreement with the Yakinites that allowed the Assyrians to destroy the walls of Dur-Yakin, while Marduk-aplu-iddina and his family and supporters were granted free passage to go into exile to Elam.

From 710 to 707, Sargon spent most of his time in the city of Babylon. He participated in the annual Akitu festival and received delegations from such far away places as Dilmun (modern Bahrain) and Yادنانا (Cyprus). The king's enthusiasm for everything Babylonian can be gauged from the prominent references found in his later inscriptions to his new Babylonian titles and various Babylonian deities (Fuchs 1994: 373–6). Not all Assyrians seem to have approved of Sargon's pro-Babylonian leanings. An Assyrian text presumably written under Esarhaddon explicitly criticizes them (see the remarks on Esarhaddon further below in this section), and Sennacherib, Sargon's son and heir, who took charge of political affairs in Assyria during Sargon's absence, appears to have found them questionable as well.

In 707, Sargon returned to Assyria. One year later, at the age of roughly sixty-five, he was able to move the royal court to Dur-Šarrukīn, which he inaugurated, according to an eponym chronicle, in the second month of 706. But the magnificent new capital was not destined to serve as royal residence for long. In 705, Sargon started off on another and, as it turned out, final campaign. The Assyrians had sought in vain for quite some time to bring the belligerent people of Tabal in central Anatolia under their control (Melville 2010), and Sargon was now eager to finally subdue this region. But his plans were thwarted and the campaign ended in disaster. Somewhere in Anatolia, the troops of a certain Gurdi (Gordias) of Kulumma seized the Assyrian camp and killed Sargon. The Assyrians who survived the rout proved unable to recover their king's body (Frahm 1999a: 74–6).

More than a military catastrophe, the death of their powerful ruler was a major psychological blow for the Assyrians. What probably raised the greatest concern was that Sargon's body had not been buried – and was therefore likely, in the view of many, to henceforth haunt the living. When news of the end of the king reached the Assyrian heartland, the influential scribe and royal advisor Nabû-zuqup-kenu – who may have been the author of several royal inscriptions (Frahm 2003: 157–9) – copied the twelfth and final tablet of the epic of Gilgamesh, which ends with a dialogue between Enkidu and Gilgamesh about the circumstances of the dead in their afterlives. The text's last lines mention a man killed in battle, one whose corpse was left in the open countryside, and one whose ghost had no provider and who therefore had to eat crumbs of bread thrown in the street (George 2003: 734–5, lines 148–53).

It seems obvious that Nabû-zuqup-kenu had Sargon in mind when he studied these scenarios, and that he must have been deeply distressed. The Biblical prophet Isaiah, in contrast, was prompted by the events to compose a mocking dirge to ridicule Sargon's hubris – provided the foreign ruler chided in Isaiah 14 is indeed modeled on that king (Frahm 1999a: 76–82, 86).

Imperial Heydays: From Sennacherib to Assurbanipal (704–631)

After Sargon's son Sennacherib (Assyrian: Sîn-aḫḫe-eriba) had ascended the Assyrian throne on the 12th of Abu (V) 705, he did everything he could to distance himself from his father. Fearing contamination, he moved the royal residence from Dur-Šarrukīn to Nineveh on the Tigris and, with one possible exception (Frahm 1997: 194–5), never mentioned Sargon's name in his inscriptions. One of the first building projects Sennacherib commissioned was the restoration of the temple of the netherworld god Nergal in Tarbiṣu (RINAP 3/2: 292–303; Frahm 2003: 129–51) – undoubtedly an attempt to pacify a deity that, due to its close links with war and violent death, was considered deeply involved with Sargon's fate.

Like that of his predecessor, the reign of Sennacherib (r. 704–681) is well documented, even though we lack the large number of political letters that have survived from the reign of Sargon.¹⁶ For the first time, an important political event, Sennacherib's 701 campaign against the Levant and Judah, is not only described at considerable length in Assyrian royal inscriptions, but also in the Hebrew Bible and classical sources (Richardson 2014), indicating that by now Assyria had been truly transformed into a budding "world empire."

Beside unsettling the Assyrian elites, Sargon's violent death in 705 had encouraged attempts among some of the recently conquered polities on the margins of the empire to reestablish their independence. In Babylon, Assyria's old arch-enemy Marduk-aplu-iddina, backed by his Elamite allies, regained the throne, while in the Levant, several Assyrian provinces and vassal states ceased to pay taxes and tribute. It took Sennacherib several years to respond to these insurrections. His first military enterprise was aimed at taking revenge for his father's death. In 704, he sent an army led by high officials to Anatolia to attack Gurdi of Kulumma, but apparently without any measurable results, since the episode is recorded only in an Assyrian eponym chronicle and not in Sennacherib's inscriptions (Frahm 1999a: 83–4). The king's subsequent assault on Babylonia, launched in all likelihood towards the end of 704, was more successful. After nearly two years of warfare, Sennacherib regained control over the region, defeating a coalition of Babylonians, Elamites,

Aramaeans, Chaldaeans, and Arabs that had resisted the Assyrian advance with great stubbornness (Fuchs/Parpola, SAA 15: XXXII–XXXIII). Marduk-aplu-iddina fled yet again and was replaced on the Babylonian throne with Bel-ibni, a scion of an old family from Babylon who had been raised at the Assyrian court (Dietrich 1998). The Assyrians deported huge numbers of people from southern Mesopotamia and seized large amounts of cattle.

In 701, Sennacherib, reacting to the uprisings that had occurred in the Levant early in his reign, led his troops westwards to reconsolidate Assyrian control in this region as well (Bagg 2011: 244–52). Lulû, the anti-Assyrian king of Sidon, fled to Cyprus and was replaced by the more amenable Tuba'lu. Numerous local rulers, including those of Byblos, Ashdod, Moab, and Edom, brought Sennacherib the tribute they had withheld during the previous four years. The people of Ekron, who had deposed their pro-Assyrian king Padî and delivered him to Hezekiah of Judah, asked for, and received, help from the Nubian rulers of Egypt. But an Assyrian army defeated the Egyptian and Nubian troops in a pitched battle at Eltheke, putting an end to Egyptian ambitions to shape events in the Levant. Finally, the Assyrian army attacked Judah, destroyed numerous of her cities, and deported significant portions of her population. The capital Jerusalem was spared, but only after the Judean ruler Hezekiah agreed to release Padî of Ekron, pay a heavy tribute to Sennacherib, and become his vassal.

Because it is also described in some detail in the Bible (2 Kings 18:13–19:36; Isaiah 36:1–37:37; 2 Chronicles 32:1–23) and by Herodotus (2.141), Sennacherib's campaign to Judah was remembered even after Mesopotamian civilization came to an end, and modern scholarship has likewise shown great interest in it (see Gallagher 1999; Grabbe 2003; Kalimi and Richardson 2014). A key question has been how to reconcile Sennacherib's accounts of the campaign – which present it as a great success – and the rather different Biblical ones, with their insistence that Sennacherib suffered a debilitating defeat in Jerusalem. All in all, there is now a wide consensus that the Biblical authors, driven by theological concerns, actually paint a rather distorted picture of the outcome of the campaign, despite the fact that they report several details accurately.

Another debate about the campaign was initiated several years ago by Stephanie Dalley, who argued that Sennacherib abstained from conquering and destroying Jerusalem because his father Sargon was married to a woman whom Dalley identified as a Judean princess: a certain Atalia, whose mortal remains were uncovered, together with those of Tiglath-pileser's wife Yabâ and an impressive golden treasure, in a tomb in Nimrud (see, most recently, Dalley 2008).¹⁷ Dalley's views have not been universally accepted. Atalia's actual background remains uncertain, and there is no reason to assume that Sennacherib treated Judah with particular leniency (see Frahm 2014: 206–8). But there are indications that the king regarded his campaign to Judah as

particularly important. In Sennacherib's annals edition from 700, which is known from more exemplars than any other version of his *res gestae*, the campaign is described at considerable length and presented as the final climax of the section on the king's military achievements.

While Sennacherib campaigned in the west, the situation in Babylonia deteriorated again. The notorious Marduk-aplu-iddina, together with another Chaldaean, Mušeziḫ-Marduk of Bit-Dakkuri, plotted against Bel-ibni, who, as an Assyrian puppet-king, lacked the authority his position required. In 700, Sennacherib invaded Babylonia, forced the two Chaldaean troublemakers into exile in Elam, and replaced Bel-ibni on the Babylonian throne with his own eldest son, Aššur-nadin-šumi.

For a while, Sennacherib had thus restored peace in the empire, at least by and large. In 697, he accompanied his army to mount Nipur (modern Judi Dağ in southeastern Anatolia) and conquered the city of Ukku in the buffer region between Assyria and Urartu. In 696 and 695, Assyrian troops led by high military officials conducted campaigns in the north and northwest, quelling, among other things, a rebellion in Cilicia that was supported by Anchiāle and Tarsus and is mentioned not only in Assyrian but also in Greek sources (Lanfranchi 2000: 22–31). But such fairly minor threats did not prevent Sennacherib from focusing his attention on non-military matters, particularly his building program in Nineveh, in the years between 699 and 695 (Reade, RIA 9: 388–433; Matthiae 1999).

Located close to an important ford across the Tigris and the departure point of a vital traffic route to the west, Nineveh was an ideal capital for the Neo-Assyrian imperial state. Sennacherib's most ambitious project in the city was the construction of a gigantic new residence, the so-called Southwest Palace, whose various wings covered a surface of some 40,000 square meters, with the throne room alone measuring 13 × 56 meters (Russell 1991). In addition, Sennacherib built a wall around Nineveh that was roughly 12 kilometers long and 25 meters high and had eighteen massive gates. It has been claimed that the park Sennacherib created in the vicinity of his palace at Nineveh was the model for the Greek story of the "Hanging Gardens of Babylon" (see, most recently, Dalley 2013), but the matter is contested (Bichler and Rollinger 2004).

After several years mostly spent at home, Sennacherib felt it was time for him to once again advance his status as a military leader. In 694, he sailed along the coast of the Persian Gulf with a fleet of boats built by Phoenician and Greek shipwrights to attack Elamite territories from the sea. Despite Sennacherib's protestations to the contrary, the ambitious project turned out a major strategic blunder, initiating a catastrophic escalation in Assyria's relations with Elam and Babylonia. The disaster began with the Elamite king Ḫallušu-Inšušinak cutting off the Assyrian troops in the south by marching into Babylonia. When the people of Babylon realized what had happened,

they seized Sennacherib's son Aššur-nadin-šumi, who served as their king, and extradited him to Elam. Aššur-nadin-šumi was probably killed in Elam, and a certain Nergal-ušešib, a member of an influential Babylonian family, ascended the Babylonian throne. Sennacherib managed to defeat and capture him within a few months in a pitched battle in the vicinity of Nippur, but proved unable to restore Assyrian control over Babylon, where the Chaldaean troublemaker Mušešib-Marduk (Frahm 1997: 209–10) became king late in 693. Suspecting that Sennacherib was eager to inflict a severe punishment on Babylon, he began immediately to gather a large coalition of allies.

In 691, Sennacherib fought a massive battle with Mušešib-Marduk and his Chaldaean, Aramaean, Elamite, and Persian supporters not far from the modern city of Samarra on the Tigris. The battle, described in Sennacherib's inscription with great rhetorical force, resulted in a draw, but one that held Sennacherib back only temporarily. In 690, he defeated and captured the influential Arab queen Te'elḥunu in northern Arabia, thereby eliminating the threat of further attacks from the southwest. One year later, in the ninth month of 689, he finally conquered Babylon. The Assyrian troops destroyed large parts of the city, captured Mušešib-Marduk, and smashed or took away numerous divine statues, an act with far-reaching theological consequences (Richardson 2012).

In the following years, Assyrians employed different strategies to cope with Sennacherib's brutal assault on Babylon – a city that many of them considered sacred and from where much of Assyria's literature and scholarship derived. Some Assyrian theologians justified the attack by ridiculing Babylonian religion. They produced a polemical cultic commentary (SAA 3: nos. 34 and 35) that presents the Babylonian god Marduk as a criminal and claims, of course falsely, that the Babylonian Akitu festival commemorated Marduk's imprisonment, and not his triumph over the forces of chaos. But since Babylonian religion, with its portrayal of Marduk as the all-powerful king of the gods, offered such an excellent theological blueprint for the autocratic imperial state, Sennacherib decided to focus on a different strategy: an Assyrianizing adaptation of Babylon's religious ideology and institutions. Assyrian scholars created a revised version of the Babylonian Epic of Creation (*Enūma eliš*), which celebrated Assur's, and no longer Marduk's, rise to supreme power; and Assyrian architects remodeled the sacred infrastructure of their own holy city, Ashur, after that of Babylon (Machinist 1984–85; Frahm 1997: 282–8; Vera Chamaza 2002: 71–167).

During the last years of Sennacherib's reign, people in most parts of the empire lived under the *pax assyriaca* (which for the Babylonians was of course more like a peace of the graveyard). The situation at the royal court in Nineveh, however, was far from peaceful. For many years, Sennacherib had groomed his son Urdu-Mullissi to become his successor. But at some point around 683, he changed his mind and nominated another son, Esarhaddon

(Assyrian: Aššur-aḫu-iddina), as his crown prince (Šašková 2010). The decision might have been influenced by Esarhaddon's mother Naqia, who had become increasingly powerful during this period. Unsurprisingly, Urdu-Mullissi and his supporters resented the new arrangement and exercised pressure on the king to reverse it. They managed to force Esarhaddon into exile somewhere in the west, but failed to convince Sennacherib to reinstate Urdu-Mullissi. So they orchestrated a coup and, late in 681, killed the king in a temple in Nineveh (Parpola 1980). Their actions were to no avail, however. Encouraged by a host of auspicious signs, Esarhaddon returned to the Assyrian capital in mid-winter with his own army and put the regicides to flight. Two months after Sennacherib's murder, Esarhaddon ascended the Assyrian throne.

Esarhaddon ruled from 680 to 669. His reign is documented by numerous royal inscriptions, oracle queries, letters, and other texts.¹⁸

Esarhaddon considered the violent deaths of his grandfather Sargon and his father Sennacherib as divine punishment for two opposite offenses: the first had worshipped the Babylonian gods excessively, while the second had neglected and humiliated them. This, at least, seems to be the message of a text probably composed during the reign of Esarhaddon in which Sennacherib seems to be speaking from beyond the grave (Tadmor, Landsberger, and Parpola 1989; Frahm 1999a: 84–6; SAA 3: no. 33). Eager to avoid the sins of his fathers, Esarhaddon strived, from early on, to establish a new “balance of power” between Assur and Marduk. He began to rebuild Babylon (Porter 1993; Streck 2002), but at the same time made sure that the cult of Assur in the city of Ashur was not neglected (Novotny 2014). Indirect evidence suggests that, in an attempt to exorcise the past, Esarhaddon set a stone slab inscribed with a text about the “sins” of his forefathers in the floor of the cella of the Assur temple and used it to prostrate himself before the deity (Frahm 1999a: 85–6).

Even though apparently of a sickly disposition, as indicated by the correspondence with his physicians (Parpola 1983: 231–6), Esarhaddon undertook a number of successful military campaigns, some in far-away regions. He defeated insurgents in Cilicia and drove the Cimmerians (who would a little later destroy the Phrygian state) westwards (679), conquered the Phoenician city of Sidon, renaming it Kar-Aššur-aḫu-iddina (“Emporium of Esarhaddon”) (677), and took the cities of Kundu and Sissû in the region northeast of the Cilician plain (676). Following battles with the Medes in the Zagros, Esarhaddon went with his troops further eastwards than any preceding king, reaching the salt-deserts of the Dasht-e-Kavir in the middle of the Iranian plateau. The king's armies also invaded eastern Arabia, conquering Diḥranu, modern Dhahran, and a number of other cities. But the greatest triumph Esarhaddon achieved was his conquest of Egypt (see Onasch 1994: 16–59), which was probably motivated by renewed attempts by Egypt's

Nubian rulers to interfere in the Levant. In 674, the Assyrian king had made a first attempt to invade the land on the Nile, but a short entry in the Babylonian Chronicle indicates that his efforts had remained futile. A second campaign three years later, however, proved successful. Rather than following the *via maris* along the Mediterranean, Esarhaddon, logistically supported by Arab tribes, crossed central Sinai on a difficult route and thus took the Egyptian defenders by surprise (Radner 2008). After three major battles with the troops of the Nubian ruler Taharqa, who eventually fled to Upper Egypt, Esarhaddon conquered the Egyptian capital Memphis. He left most of the local rulers of Lower Egypt in place, but deployed representatives of his own to oversee their activities. In the hope that this arrangement would suffice to keep Egypt under control, Esarhaddon eventually returned to Assyria, bringing with him a large booty and numerous Egyptian craftsmen and religious experts uprooted from their country.

With the conquest of Egypt, Esarhaddon had not only defeated a land of great wealth and cultural prestige, the Assyrian empire had also reached the largest geographic extent of its history until then. All this, one would expect, should have made Esarhaddon's initially precarious position as king unassailable among the Assyrian elite. The reality, however, was quite different. During the period of the Egyptian conquest, several high-profile insurgencies against the king occurred, and not just somewhere in the periphery, but in three of Assyria's most important urban centers. The letter SAA 10: no. 179 informs us that in Nineveh, the Assyrian Chief Eunuch had forced a high-profile Babylonian, who was held as a hostage, to drink large quantities of wine and then establish through oil divination that the eunuch would replace Esarhaddon as king. In Ḫarran, according to another letter (SAA 16: no. 59), a prophetess had announced that the god Nusku would "destroy the name and seed of Sennacherib (i.e., Esarhaddon)." And in Ashur, as reported by a third letter (Frahm 2010 and [Figure 8.3](#)), the overseer of the city, after dreaming of a child rising from a tomb and handing him a staff, apparently a symbol of power, had instigated a plot against Esarhaddon as well.



Figure 8.3 Letter to the Assyrian king Esarhaddon reporting a conspiracy in the city of Ashur (YBC 11382).

Source: Frahm 2010: 134. Reproduced with permission of Yale Babylonian Collection.

Esarhaddon eventually uncovered all these attempted coups and in 670 put numerous high-ranking officials involved in them to death. He owed his political and physical survival to a highly developed domestic intelligence apparatus comprised of spies, finks, and professional agents provocateurs who wrote numerous letters to him (most of them published in SAA 16) in which they denounced a host of actual and imaginary political enemies. These letters represent the domestic counterpart to the messages from the reign of Sargon that deal with political developments in the empire's periphery or in foreign countries (see above, "Genesis of an Empire"). The domestic spies, much like informers anywhere, were apparently not much beloved. One of them writes: "because of what I hear and see and betray to the king my lord, many people hate me and are plotting to kill me" (Frahm 2010: 94). Incidentally, this complaint also demonstrates to what extent the Assyrian spies resembled the informers of the Achaemenid rulers from a few centuries later whom Greek authors such as Herodotus and Plutarch called the "eyes and ears of the king."

In order to stifle the opposition, Esarhaddon took other measures as well. When, early in 672, he formally nominated his son Assurbanipal (Assyrian: Aššur-bani-apli) as his future successor on the Assyrian throne, and another son, Šamaš-šumu-ukin, as future king of Babylon, he forced everyone in the empire, from members of the royal house to vassals in far away countries, to swear a solemn oath to respect the succession arrangement and report on anyone who failed to do so, including members of the oath taker's own family (SAA 2: no. 6, lines 115–16). Copies of these oaths, which may have influenced the covenant theology of the Biblical book of Deuteronomy (see [Chapter 29](#)), were found in Kalḫu, Ashur, and Tell Tayinat on the Orontes (SAA 2: no. 6; KAL 3: 135–6; Lauinger 2012).

The measures taken by the king to ensure a smooth transition of power after his passing were not entirely in vain. In 669, after Esarhaddon had died from an illness while on another campaign to Egypt, Assurbanipal did in fact ascend the Assyrian throne. One year later, Šamaš-šumu-ukin became king of Babylon, assuming a position conceived as largely ceremonial, with Assurbanipal holding the actual reins of power. Even though we know nothing about specific attempts to thwart this arrangement, there was apparently some dissatisfaction with it – otherwise, there would not have been a need for Esarhaddon's mother Naqia, who retained much of her considerable *potestas indirecta* during the transition period, to force members of the royal family and the nation at large to swear another oath of allegiance to Assurbanipal (SAA 2: no. 8).

The reign of Assurbanipal (668–631), the last "great" king of Assyria, is abundantly documented, both by the king's own inscriptions, more numerous and diverse than any other Mesopotamian ruler's, and by considerable numbers of state letters and other texts.¹⁹ Under Assurbanipal, the Assyrian military machine spread its terror throughout Western Asia one more time. In

667 and 664, in each case in the wake of anti-Assyrian rebellions, Assyrian troops again invaded Egypt, defeated the last rulers of the 25th dynasty, Taharqa and Tantamani, and eventually conquered the Upper Egyptian capital of Thebes, from where huge amounts of booty – including two large obelisks made of electron – were sent to Assyria (Onasch 1994: 61–158).

Another target of Assyrian military action was Elam (Waters 2000: 42–80). Under Esarhaddon, relations with this country had been fairly amicable, to the extent that the king and his Elamite counterpart apparently signed a peace treaty at some point. When Assurbanipal ascended the throne, this treaty remained initially in place, and Assurbanipal claims that, early in his reign, he sent grain to Elam when there was a famine. But in 664, a surprise attack on Babylonia by the Elamite king Urtak ushered in a period of renewed hostility.²⁰ In 653, after a ten year long stalemate, Assyrian troops defeated the Elamite king Teumman in a battle along the Ulay river in Khuzestan. The head of the enemy ruler, whom Assurbanipal seems to have hated more than any other of his opponents, was brought to Nineveh and displayed to the public. On the famous bas-relief from the North Palace that shows Assurbanipal banqueting with his queen, it hangs from a nearby tree, recognizable by its characteristic receding hairline ([Chapter 24](#), [Figure 24.9](#)). Elam, however, far from being vanquished for good, continued to provoke Assyria and act against her interests. In 652, when Šamaš-šumu-ukin initiated a rebellion against his brother Assurbanipal to gain his independence, several Elamite kings supported him.

The war between Assurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukin went on for four years (see Frame 1992: 131–90). An attempt by their sister Šerua-eṭīrat to restore peace between them remained futile. Assurbanipal finally prevailed. In 648, after a long siege that caused a terrible famine, his troops conquered Babylon and devastated the city. Šamaš-šumu-ukin died in the flames of his burning palace, and Assurbanipal replaced him with a puppet ruler by the name of Kandalanu. In 647, Assyrian troops also conquered and ravaged the Elamite capital Susa, desecrating sanctuaries and graves and returning a statue of the goddess Nanaya allegedly stolen centuries earlier by the Elamites to her home city Uruk.

Assurbanipal participated only rarely in person in the military campaigns undertaken by his armies, but his inscriptions suggest that, once his enemies had been captured and brought to Nineveh, he devised with great enthusiasm elaborate choreographies of terror to humiliate and torture them (see, e.g., Borger 1996: 227–8). With even greater passion than such somewhat sadist pursuits, the king followed yet another interest: the study of Mesopotamia's ancient literary culture. Already as a youth, according to one of his inscriptions, Assurbanipal had read difficult Sumerian and Akkadian texts, including complicated extispicy commentaries (Frame and George 2005: 279–80). When he became king, his love of cuneiform lore did not decrease. Using

the massive resources now at his disposal, Assurbanipal created in Nineveh what in some respects can be described as the first “universal” library in the history of mankind. Besides texts from Assyrian cities, it included hundreds of clay tablets and wooden writing boards from Babylonia, which were initially sent to Assurbanipal as gifts or in exchange for money, and subsequently brought to Nineveh by Assyrian agents as war reparations (see Fincke 2003/04 and [Chapter 21](#) of the present volume). Some 500 years later, in the second century BCE, nostalgic Babylonian scholars would still copy letters pertaining to the library that had allegedly once been exchanged between their predecessors and the learned Assyrian king (Frame and George 2005; Frahm 2005a).

In his inscriptions, Assurbanipal presents Assyria as the uncontested hegemon of Western Asia, claiming that even nature was affected by the imposing aura of his kingship, with barley stalks growing taller and cattle producing more offspring than ever before (Borger 1996: 205). In reality, however, the gigantic Assyrian ship of state began, first slowly and then more rapidly, to show cracks during the king’s long reign. Shortly after 656, Psammetichus I of Sais, a former Assyrian ally who had spent some time in Nineveh as a hostage, expelled the Assyrians from Egypt, founding the 26th Egyptian dynasty. Another unfaithful one-time vassal, the Lydian ruler Guggu – who had a remarkable “afterlife” as Gyges among the Greeks and as Gog in the Bible – supported Psammetichus’s revolt. The numerous campaigns against Arab tribes on the Arabian peninsula and in the southern Levant wasted valuable resources while failing to consolidate Assyrian control over these regions (see Gerardi 1992 and [Chapter 16](#) in the present volume). Last but not least, Assurbanipal’s decision to ravage yet again the ancient city of Babylon fanned the flames of hate there and intensified the anti-Assyrian resentment many Babylonians felt.

From the time after 639, only two Assurbanipal inscriptions have survived (Novotny 2003: 215). This paucity of royal *res gestae* from Assurbanipal’s later years – which contrasts sharply with an overabundance of such records especially from the 640s – may in part result from the chances of discovery, but probably also reflects to some extent the beginnings of a serious political crisis. Unfortunately, no Assyrian eponym lists are extant beyond 649 (a Babylonian chronicle covering Assyrian history breaks off in 667), and so it remains unclear what really happened towards the end of the king’s time in power. But it is noteworthy that several documents from Assurbanipal’s reign record large land grants and tax exemptions for eunuchs, who apparently became more powerful than ever before during this period (Deller 1999: 306–7). Moreover, in an unprecedented move, the king nominated his chief singer, a certain Bulluṭu, as eponym at some point late in his reign. All this suggests a growing disconnect between Assurbanipal and members of the traditional Assyrian elites and it brings to mind some of the legendary stories about

Sardanapallus, the decadent last king of Assyria of Greek tradition, whose name and character were modeled on Assurbanipal (Reade 1998: 263).

Assyria's Downfall (631–609)

When Assurbanipal died, probably in 631,²¹ Assyria faced some serious problems. But those who witnessed the king's passing had little reason to suspect that the Assyrian empire would last for no longer than two more decades. After all, Elam and Urartu, Assyria's old enemies, were severely weakened at this point, and Babylonia was calm. Assyria's sudden collapse came unexpectedly and was a dramatic spectacle that left a deep impression on the neighboring nations. Biblical and classical authors reflected extensively on it (Machinist 1997), providing different explanations. The former suggested that god had decided to destroy Assyria in order to punish Assyrian hubris, while the latter blamed the personal shortcomings of the last Assyrian king for the empire's demise.

Modern scholarship has focused more on structural factors such as "imperial overstretch," but without reaching a consensus either on what really brought about Assyria's collapse (Liverani 2001). In fact, even the apparently simple task of reconstructing the main events of the empire's deadly struggle for survival has proven difficult. The Biblical and classical sources cannot be considered reliable, Assyrian royal inscriptions are, unsurprisingly, rare and largely silent on the political and military history of the last two decades of the empire, and the inscriptions of the victorious Babylonian king Nabopolassar, even though more numerous (see Da Riva 2013), have likewise little to say on the momentous historical events of this age, focusing instead, in accordance with Babylonian tradition, on construction work and religious matters. The most important sources for the reconstruction of the history of the last decades of the Assyrian empire are therefore, on one hand, the Babylonian chronicles that cover the first years of Nabopolassar and the years 616–09 (Glassner 2004: 214–25) and, on the other, the archival documents from Assyrian and especially Babylonian cities whose date formulas help establish the changing fortunes of the warring parties (Na'aman 1991; Oelsner 1999). Based primarily on these sources, various attempts have been made in the past decades to reconstruct the events that led to Assyria's fall (e.g., Zawadzki 1988; Oates 1991; Beaulieu 1997a). The following sketch is mainly based on Fuchs 2014.

Assurbanipal's successor to the Assyrian throne was his son Aššur-etel-ilani (630–627), who was probably a minor when he became king (for references to him and some important bibliography, see PNA 1/I: 183–4 (J. Brinkman)).

According to the preamble of a royal grant from Nineveh (SAA 12: no. 35), he had been installed, against considerable opposition, by the Chief Eunuch Sîn-šumu-lišir, who in all likelihood held the actual reins of power.

That some high official governed the state on behalf of the king was not an unprecedented situation in Assyria. But in 627, when Aššur-etel-ilani, under unclear circumstances, disappeared from the scene, a dramatic new development took place – Sîn-šumu-lišir ascended the throne himself, effectively ending more than a thousand years of uninterrupted rule by members of the Adasi dynasty.²² This event must have exacerbated the looming crisis of legitimacy the Assyrian state experienced.

The problems did not go away when Sîn-šumu-lišir, after a few months in office, disappeared as well, to be succeeded by another son of Assurbanipal by the name of Sîn-šarru-iškun (references to him are collected in PNA 3/I: 1143–5 (J. Novotny); for a historical sketch, see RIA 12: 522–4 (H. Schaudig)). Things became more critical, in fact, due to the situation in Babylonia, where the death of the pro-Assyrian Babylonian puppet king Kandalanu, likewise in 627, bolstered Babylonian hopes to shake off the Assyrian yoke. A certain Nabû-aplu-ušur, better known as Nabopolassar, took the lead of those who sought to fight for independence. His background has long been unclear – in his inscriptions, Nabopolassar calls himself a “son of a nobody.” Recently, Michael Jursa (2007), based on a new analysis of the letter ABL 469, suggested that Nabopolassar was a scion of a family from Uruk who had held a number of high positions in that city on behalf of the Assyrians in the seventh century BCE. Nabopolassar himself, according to Jursa, might have served as governor of Uruk at some point. Even though there is currently no final proof for this scenario, it is all but obvious that Nabopolassar had indeed a close relationship with Uruk.

In 626, Nabopolassar achieved a crucial breakthrough: in the eighth month of that year, a few weeks after Assyrian armies had suffered agonizing defeats against Babylonian forces at Babylon and Uruk, the people of Babylon made him their king. In the following years, Babylonia became the battleground for numerous brutal clashes between Assyrian and Babylonian troops, with cities repeatedly changing possession and the Babylonians slowly but steadily managing to force Sîn-šarru-iškun’s armies out from their territory.

It is doubtful, however, that Nabopolassar would ever have scored a final victory over the hated Assyrian enemy had he not received support from a somewhat unexpected ally: the mountain-dwelling Medes in the east. For a long time divided through tribal fragmentation, which had enabled the Assyrians to control them (Radner 2003a), the Medes, after gaining their independence through a process of secondary state formation (S. Brown 1986), had finally been united by a certain Cyaxares (Umakištar). Cyaxares joined forces with Nabopolassar, and their combined armies carried the fight into the Assyrian heartland. In 615, Median troops conquered Arrapha, and

one year later, they devastated the city of Ashur (Miglus 2000b), desecrating and plundering temples and palaces and demolishing the Assyrian royal tombs.

Without doubt, this assault on Assyria's religious heart must have been devastating for Assyrian morale. A dramatic letter from Tušḫan in the Upper Tigris valley illustrates how the final breakdown of Assyrian power came about in the capitals of Assyria's provinces (Parpola 2008). The decisive blow came in 612, when Babylonian and Median armies, after a two months long siege, conquered Nineveh, whose generously large city gates, built by Sennacherib, now proved a strategic liability (Stronach 1997; Reade, RIA 9: 427–8). The enemy forces looted the city thoroughly and indulged in an orgy of destruction. The Assyrian king, Sîn-šarru-iškun, was killed.

The conquest of Nineveh marked the effective end of the Assyrian empire, even though the events of 612 were followed by a short historical “coda.” In the city of Ḫarran, located on the Baliḫ river in Syria, an Assyrian prince who had survived the devastation in the Assyrian heartland refused to surrender, claiming instead kingship for himself. He assumed the throne name Aššur-uballiṭ (II), after the famous earlier king who had established Assyria as a significant political power during the Middle Assyrian period (see [Chapter 6](#)), and, supported by Egyptian troops that had invaded Syria during the preceding years, offered some last resistance. If the anonymous “crown prince” mentioned in a few late documents from Dur-Katlimmu on the Khabur is indeed to be identified with Aššur-uballiṭ (thus Radner 2002: 17–18), he would have held some authority in the west for a little while. But in 610, Median and Babylonian troops drove Aššur-uballiṭ away from Ḫarran, and, after a failed attempt in 609 to reconquer the city with Egyptian help, he disappeared from the scene. The Assyrian state had finally ceased to exist.

What were the primary causes for Assyria's sudden end? As pointed out before, the question cannot be easily answered, but a few factors, both internal and external, seem to stand out. During the years 631 to 627, and possibly longer (Fuchs 2014: 35–6, 54–8), various contenders fought for the Assyrian throne. This domestic strife must have produced a serious crisis of legitimacy for the crown, especially among members of the Assyrian elite, who in all likelihood felt increasingly disconnected from their king. What made the situation worse was the fact that the internal fabric of the Assyrian state had been weakened for some time. Many presumably experienced and capable officials had been executed during the reign of Esarhaddon, and others had lost their positions to eunuchs during that of Assurbanipal.

Externally, Assyria's rule had always suffered from certain structural vulnerabilities. As recently stressed by Bagg (2013: 305–8), Assyria was an “empire without mission” that sought to achieve maximum profits, in the form of tribute, taxes, and labor, through a policy based on minimal investments, both logistically and ideologically. Except for order and freedom from strife,

the Assyrian state had little to offer to the various polities it had subjugated in the course of the centuries – and it had often alienated these polities by spreading fear and terror. The people ruled by Assyria had therefore few incentives to remain loyal when the empire came under attack.

An additional factor that might have contributed to Assyria's predicament has recently been discussed by Schneider and Adalı (2014): a conceivably massive rise during the last century of the empire in the population of the Assyrian heartland may have led to a crisis when a period of – possibly severe – drought set in during the mid-seventh century, apparently affecting Assyria far more than Babylonia. How significant these demographic and climate-generated changes were remains, however, uncertain.

Despite all these challenges, Assyria might have survived had the unexpected coalition between the Babylonians and the Medes not created a perfect storm that finally brought her down.

The “Afterlife” and Legacy of the Assyrian Empire

Aššur-uballit's disappearance from the scene in 609 marked not only the end of Assyrian kingship but also that of the Assyrian state, its institutional infrastructure, and, to a significant extent, Assyrian urban culture. Palaces, temples, and many private houses in key Assyrian cities such as Ashur, Kalḫu, and Nineveh were destroyed, and to the best of our current knowledge no one in the Assyrian heartland wrote on clay tablets ever again, neither in cuneiform nor in Aramaic. Outside the empire's core area, as illustrated by a few documents from Dur-Katlimmu on the Khabur, cuneiform writing in the Assyrian language and script continued for a few more years (Dalley 1990; Postgate 1993; Radner 2002: 16–19, 61–9), but no documents are known from after 600 BCE, the date of the latest legal document from Dur-Katlimmu (Radner 2002: 68–9; for Assyrian texts from “post-Assyrian” Babylonia, see Pedersén 2009).

To what extent Assyrian cities and their inhabitants survived the assault by the Median and Babylonian troops is a question that has raised considerable discussion in recent years. It is certainly true that the often promoted view that these cities were all reduced to rubble and entirely uninhabited after 612 cannot be upheld. Stephanie Dalley (1993; 2013: 179–202) in particular has repeatedly emphasized that there is evidence for continued urban life in Assyria. In certain parts of Nineveh, for instance, four levels of “post-Assyrian” occupation before the Hellenistic period have been traced (Reade, RIA 9: 428). Ashur is mentioned in Cyrus's famous cylinder inscription, as a place to which the Persian king returned a number of divine statues (Schaudig 2001: 550–6, line 30), and there is evidence that the cult of the god Assur

continued in Ashur, in a sanctuary built in close proximity to the old one, the so-called “Temple A.” As observed by Miglus (1992), this temple has yielded numerous royal inscriptions from various periods of Assyrian history, suggesting that it may have served for a while as a “lieu de mémoire” to the survivors of the catastrophe of 614. According to Aramaic inscriptions, the old Assyrian deities Assur and Šerua, as well as a few other gods, were still worshipped in Ashur in the second and even in the early third century AD (Beyer 1998: 11–25) – obviously evidence for a continuous religious tradition. Arbela (Erbil) remained an urban center of some importance as well. It features in Darius’s Bisitun inscription and later became the capital of the kingdom of Adiabene, where certain Assyrian traditions lived on (see Reade 2001; Walker 2006–07).

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that there are few archaeological traces of really substantial reconstruction work undertaken in Assyrian cities during the first centuries after the fall of Assyria. It was apparently only during the Parthian period that some of the sites of Assyria’s ancient urban centers, especially Ashur (Miglus 2000b; Hauser 2011), but also Arbela and Nineveh (Reade, *RIA* 9: 428–9), grew into more important cities again, probably due to their strategic location. During the roughly 500 years between the fall of Assyria and the arrival of the Parthians, these sites seem to have experienced widespread, albeit not total, abandonment. It is telling that when the Greek general Xenophon marched through Assyria in 399 BCE, he proved unable to find out the ancient names of the Assyrian cities he passed – he called Ashur “Kainai”(?), Kalḫu “Larissa,” and Nineveh “Mespila” (*Anabasis* II.4.28, III.4.7, III.4.10; Hauser 2011: 125–6). Admittedly, Xenophon writes that Kainai, which he saw from the eastern bank of the Tigris but did not visit, was a “large and prosperous city,”²³ and the names of a few Assyrian cities such as Nineveh and Arbela actually remained in use, despite Xenophon’s ignorance; but it seems, nonetheless, undeniable that these cities suffered massive destruction in 612 and a dramatic decline in population in the years after.

In Babylonia, despite the deep tensions that had characterized Assyro-Babylonian relations in the seventh century, certain facets of Assyrian culture lived on after the fall of the Assyrian empire. Assyrian families residing in Babylonian cities were apparently allowed to hold on to their cultural identity, at least to some extent. Tellingly, several archival documents from Nebuchadnezzar’s palace in Babylon are written in Assyrian script (Pedersén 2009), indicating that the bureaucrats serving at the Neo-Babylonian court included native Assyrians. The last Neo-Babylonian king, Nabonidus, may have had Assyrian roots on his mother’s side, and artworks from his reign display a number of Assyrian features (Schaudig 2001: 12–14, 39–40). Individuals with decidedly Assyrian names are attested in “post-Assyrian” texts from Babylon, Sippar, Dilbat, Borsippa, Nippur, and Uruk (Zadok

1998). The evidence from Uruk is of particular interest. As demonstrated by Beaulieu (1997b), bearers of Assyrian names were closely associated with a local temple there that was dedicated to the cult of AN.ŠĀR–Aššur. Their community continued to exist throughout the Chaldaean period and lasted at least until the reign of the Persian king Cambyses (see [Chapter 28](#)). A tablet from Assurbanipal’s library, SBTU 2, no. 46, was found in a library in Uruk whose owner was active during the time of Alexander the Great, and there are hints that scholars in Uruk used text editions strongly influenced by Assyrian traditions (Beaulieu 2010). Babylonian chronicles kept alive the memory of important events that had occurred during the Neo-Assyrian period, and scribes from Babylon and Borsippa continued to copy (pseudepigraphical or real) letters exchanged between Assyrian monarchs on the one hand and Babylonian kings and scholars on the other until the late second century BCE (Frame and George 2005; Frahm 2005a).

Perhaps of even greater significance is that a number of key components of Nabopolassar’s and Nebuchadnezzar’s new Neo-Babylonian state were based on the example of the Assyrian empire. This applies, in particular, to the organization of the central palace bureaucracy under Nebuchadnezzar, which followed Assyrian and not Babylonian models (Jursa 2010). Certain features of Nebuchadnezzar’s massive construction work in Babylon, such as the rectangular plan of the inner city and the location of the king’s North Palace on a raised terrace across the city wall, were likewise inspired by Assyrian traditions.

There were, however, also differences in the urban setup, most importantly the central position within Babylon of the gigantic temple of Marduk (Beaulieu 2008). Unlike the great Neo-Assyrian cities Kalḫu, Dur-Šarrukin, and Nineveh, Babylon was not primarily the glamorous abode of a king, but a temple city, and as such it survived by more than 700 years the overthrow of the Chaldaean dynasty in 539 BCE. The contrast with Assyria’s royal cities, which largely collapsed once Assyrian kingship was gone, is striking.

The legacy left by the Assyrian empire in the regions west of the Euphrates was likewise significant, as epitomized by the fact that the name “Syria,” used from antiquity until today, derives from “Assyria” (Rollinger 2006). Centuries of Assyrian interference had thoroughly changed the political and ethnolinguistic makeup of the region, with long-lasting consequences. And even though Assyrian imperialism did not include forced religious conversions, it did also reshape the religious views of the people in the West, most prominently in Israel and Judah. Several scholars have observed that certain portions of the Biblical book of Deuteronomy display close similarities both in form and content with the stipulations and loyalty oaths of Assyrian vassal treaties (Steymans 1995; Otto 1999; Radner 2006) – one of which is now known from a tablet found at Tell Tayinat on the Orontes (Lauinger 2012). It seems that the covenant theology articulated in Deuteronomy

represents a reaction to these treaties – but with absolute loyalty towards god replacing loyalty to the Assyrian king, and monotheism superseding the monarchical rule of a foreign ruler.

Assyria played a prominent role, both as an example of a dangerous “otherness” and as an object of fascination, in the historical and narrative traditions of ancient Israel, Egypt, and the classical world. The Bible mentions “Aššur,” which usually denotes Assyria, some 150 times. It is particularly interested in Assyria’s western expansion between 745 and 700, and above all in Sennacherib’s attack on Jerusalem, but also in the fall of Assyria, which is the topic of the book of Nahum. Genesis 10: 8–11 describes the founding of Assyria by a legendary figure named Aššur. Of the historical kings of Assyria, the Bible mentions Tiglath-pileser III, Shalmaneser V, Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and possibly Assurbanipal (references: Millard 1976; for a more detailed discussion, see [Chapter 29](#)).

Texts by Greek and Roman historians focus on the creation of the Assyrian empire, ascribed to the legendary king and conqueror Ninus; the remarkable deeds of his wife, Semiramis, whose name derives from that of Sammu-ramat, the influential mother of king Adad-nirari III (Pettinato 1985, and see above, “Internal Conflicts and Fragmentation of Power”); and the fall of the empire, which most authors incorrectly link, for the sake of dramatic effect, to the reign of the effeminate “Sardanapallus,” that is, Assurbanipal (see above, “Imperial Heydays”).²⁴ The Orientalizing tropes of powerful females and decadent male autocrats are typical for the perception of Western Asia among Greeks and Romans. Of particular importance for the classical view of Assyria were the writings of Ctesias of Cnidus (born ca. 441 BCE) (Lenfant 2004). The idea that there was, throughout history, a succession of empires (*translatio imperii*) that began with Assyria is first attested in Herodotus (Lanfranchi 2003; Rollinger 2011; see also the more detailed discussion by R. Rollinger in [Chapter 30](#) of this volume).

The Neo-Assyrian kings Sennacherib and Esarhaddon feature prominently in the Aramaic Ahiqar story, about a legendary(?) royal advisor of that name (Niehr 2007). First attested on a papyrus from Elephantine dated to ca. 500 BCE, the story was later translated into a host of other languages. In a number of Demotic tales belonging to the so-called Pedubastis Cycle, Esarhaddon plays an important role as well, as the opponent of the heroic Egyptian warrior Inarus. The tales were inspired by the Assyrian invasion of Egypt in 671. A papyrus from Egypt written in Demotic script but Aramaic language tells the story of the bloody war between Assurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukin (Dalley 2001; Ryholt 2004), and a Demotic tale about the battle between the Egyptians and the Amazons features a certain Serpot, queen of the Amazons, who may be modeled on the Assyrian empress Sammu-ramat–Semiramis (thus Zauzich 2010).

Some key figures of Assyrian history seem to have inspired the narrative

traditions of neighboring civilizations in more indirect ways. The most prominent examples come from the Hebrew Bible. It is quite feasible, for instance, that the mocking dirge commemorating the downfall of an oppressive anonymous “king of Babel” in Isaiah 14 was originally aimed at Sargon II (Frahm 1999a: 86, with earlier references). Christian theologians such as Origen later reinterpreted the passage as referring to the devil. The Biblical tale of Jonah (a name that means “dove”) and the great fish may draw on the Semiramis legend, which, in turn, goes back to stories about the Assyrian queen Sammu-ramat (Weinfeld 1991; Frahm 2016). According to Greek tradition, Semiramis, the daughter of the fish-bodied goddess Derceto (Atargatis) of Ashkelon, was fed by doves when an infant and turned into a dove after her death. Finally, there is a certain likelihood that the Biblical story of Joseph (especially Genesis 37:1–11) was inspired by tales of Esarhaddon’s rise to power (see Frahm 2009: 39–41 and the more detailed discussion in [Chapter 29](#) of the present volume).

There are other possible links between Biblical stories and events from Assyrian history (see, inter alia, Dalley 2007), but they cannot be discussed here. The same applies to the possible influence Assyrian traditions had on classical authors such as Homer (see, e.g., West 1997: 375–80), and the numerous adaptations of stories featuring Assyrian motifs from antiquity to modern times (for an attempt to trace the Semiramis tradition through the centuries, see Asher-Greve 2006). The adoption of ancient Assyrian culture by “Neo-Assyrian” Aramaic Christians since the 19th century will be examined in [Chapter 32](#).

In conclusion, we can say that the Neo-Assyrian empire, despite its dramatic sudden fall, left a legacy of great consequence. The political structures it had established became a model for the empires that succeeded it, and stories linked to Assyrian kings and queens continue to resonate until today.

Abbreviation

For the abbreviations CTN, KAL 3, PNA, RIMA, RINAP, and SAA, see Further Reading below.

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Further Reading

Comprehensive bibliographies of Neo-Assyrian studies from 1948–2006 are provided by Hämeen-Anttila 1987, Deller 1988, Mattila and Radner 1997, Luukko and Gaspa 2008, and Gaspa 2011–12. For an electronic bibliography, see H. D. Baker and M. Groß, https://www.zotero.org/groups/neo-assyrian_bibliography (accessed 03/15/2016).

Most of the primary sources pertaining to Neo-Assyrian history are available in up-to-date editions. Many royal inscriptions are published in the series *Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Assyrian Periods* = RIMA, vols. 2 and 3 (Toronto, ed. A. K. Grayson) and *Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Neo-Assyrian Period* = RINAP, vols. 1–4 (Winona Lake, ed. G. Frame). For additional texts and more discussion, see, inter alia, Fuchs 1994, Borger 1996, Frahm 1997, and id., *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur literarischen Inhalts* (= KAL), vol. 3. Letters to Neo-Assyrian kings, treaties and loyalty oaths, literary and religious texts in Neo-Assyrian language, Neo-Assyrian prophecies, astronomical reports, grants and decrees, as well as legal and administrative

texts are edited in the series *State Archives of Assyria* = SAA (Helsinki, ed. S. Parpola), a key resource for anyone working on the Neo-Assyrian period. The five volumes of the series *Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud* (= CTN, London) provide copies and editions of Neo-Assyrian texts from Kalḫu. Both RINAP and SAA are also available online on the Oracc website established by S. Tinney (<http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/rinap> and <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/saao>). Photos of numerous tablets from Assurbanipal's library housed in the British Museum are found at <http://cdli.ucla.edu/collections/bm/bm.html>.

For an introduction to the Assyrian “State Archives” and their potential as a historical source, see Fales 2001. The series *State Archives of Assyria Studies* = SAAS (Helsinki, ed. S. Parpola) provides valuable analyses of various political, social, economic, and cultural aspects of Neo-Assyrian history. A substantial number of recent volumes of the series *Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft* (Wiesbaden, various editors) and *Berichte der Ausgrabung Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad/Dūr-Katlimmu* (Berlin, ed. H. Kühne) provide important new materials and studies related to the cities Ashur and Dur-Katlimmu during the Neo-Assyrian period. The *Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* = PNA (Helsinki, ed. K. Radner and H. Baker) serves as a “Who is Who” of Neo-Assyrian times. Parpola and Porter 2001 includes a series of maps related to the empire. Essays on various topics concerning Assyria are found in Parpola and Whiting 1997 and Maul and Heeßel 2010. The web site “Assyrian empire builders,” established by K. Radner at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/sargon/>, provides access to important resources for the reigns of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II and useful materials for undergraduate courses on the Assyrian empire.

Among the hundreds of important studies of specific aspects of Neo-Assyrian history and culture, only a few can be singled out here. The selection is necessarily subjective, and certain areas, for example Neo-Assyrian art and architecture, are not considered. On political and military history: Grayson 1982, Grayson 1991a–c, Frame 1992, Mayer 1995, Bagg 2011, and Radner 2014; historical geography: Liverani 1995; warfare: Fuchs 2005 and Fales 2010a; intelligence gathering: Dubovský 2006a and Frahm 2010; royal ideology: Maul 1999; the provincial system: Radner 2006–08; social and economic structure of the empire: Postgate 1985 and Radner 1997; religion: Menzel 1981, Maul 2000, and Meinhold 2009; literature, scholarship, and intellectual life: Parpola 1983, Frahm 1999a, D. Brown 2000, Fincke 2003/04, Frame and George 2005, Maul 2010, and the web site <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/cams/gkab/established> by E. Robson; law: Jas 1996 and Radner 2003b; royal women: Svärd 2015; hydraulic engineering: Bagg 2000; the Neo-Assyrian language: Hämeen-Anttila 2000; Assyrian views of Assyria: Machinist 1993. Various aspects of Assyria's “legacy” have been explored by the Helsinki *Melammu* project (bibliography and database at

<http://www.aakk1.helsinki.fi/melammu/>). Studies on the rediscovery of Assyria in the nineteenth century and the history of modern scholarship on the Neo-Assyrian period include Larsen 1996 and Holloway 2006.

Notes

- 1 This chapter is to a significant extent identical with an article on Neo-Assyrian history written by me for the forthcoming *Handbook of Ancient Mesopotamia*, edited by Gonzalo Rubio. I am grateful to Rubio for giving me permission to reuse it here. The chapter in the present volume was originally assigned to another author, who proved unable to complete it, forcing me to step in at short notice.
- 2 For remarks on “Assyrian uniforms,” see Postgate 2001.
- 3 Royal inscriptions related to Aššur-dan II: RIMA 2: 131–41. References to the king: PNA 1/I: 178–9 (K. Akerman). Historical sketch of his reign: Grayson 1982: 248–9.
- 4 Royal inscriptions related to Adad-nirari II: RIMA 2: 142–2; KAL 3: 43–9. References to the king: PNA 1/I: 30–1 (K. Radner). Historical sketch of his reign: Grayson 1982: 249–51.
- 5 Royal inscriptions related to Tukulti-Ninurta II: RIMA 2: 163–88; KAL 3: 49–56; Tournay 1998; Ahmad 2000. References to the king: PNA 3/II: 1332–3 (H. D. Baker). Historical sketches of his reign: Grayson 1982: 251–3; RIA 14: 178–9 (E. Frahm).
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- 7 Royal and other inscriptions related to Shalmaneser III: RIMA 3: 5–179; KAL 3: 62–8; Frahm 2015a. References to the king: PNA 3/I: 1072–6 (H. D. Baker/S. Yamada). Historical sketches of his reign: Grayson 1982: 259–69; RIA 11: 581–5 (H. D. Baker). Campaigns to the west: Yamada 2000.
- 8 Royal and other inscriptions related to Šamši-Adad V: RIMA 3: 180–99. References to the king: PNA 3/II: 1225 (H. D. Baker). Historical sketches of his reign: Grayson 1982: 269–71; RIA 11: 636–8 (H. D. Baker).
- 9 Royal and other inscriptions related to Adad-nirari III: RIMA 3: 20–38; KAL 3: 69–70, 154–6(?); Radner 2012 = Siddall 2013: 193–7. References

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- 10 Royal and other inscriptions related to Shalmaneser IV: RIMA 3: 239–44. References to the king: PNA 3/I: 1076–7 (K. Radner). Historical sketches of his reign: Grayson 1982: 276–9; RIA 11: 585 (H. D. Baker).
 - 11 References to the king: PNA 3/I: 1076–7 (A. Fuchs, K. Radner, J. A. Brinkman); historical sketch of his reign: Grayson 1982: 278.
 - 12 There has been some discussion on whether Tiglath-pileser III really was a son of Adad-nirari III, and his alleged previous service as governor of Kalḫu is even more debated; for discussions of the relevant sources, see PNA 3/II: 1329 and Siddall 2013: 125–7.
 - 13 For other references to the king see PNA 3/II: 1329–31 (H. D. Baker). Historical sketches of his reign: Grayson 1991a: 71–85 and Yamada, RINAP 1: 1–2, 12–14; see also the “Supplementary Studies” in Tadmor 1994.
 - 14 References to the king: PNA 3/I: 1077 (H. D. Baker). Historical sketches of his reign: Grayson 1991a: 85–6; RIA 11: 585–87 (H. D. Baker); RINAP 1: 2, 14 (S. Yamada).
 - 15 A comprehensive edition of Sargon’s royal inscriptions by G. Frame in the RINAP series is in an advanced stage of preparation; for an overview, see RIA 12: 52 (A. Fuchs). Many of the most important inscriptions are edited in Fuchs 1994 and Fuchs 1998; for recently discovered new texts, see KAL 3: 71–6, Frame 2009, Frahm 2013, and Lauinger 2015. References to the king: PNA 3/2: 1239–47 (Fuchs); historical sketches of his reign: Grayson 1991a: 86–102; RIA 12: 51–61 (Fuchs) (which should be consulted for references to the sources on which the following discussion of Sargon’s reign is based), and Melville 2016. See also Younger 2002 and, especially for the letters from Sargon’s reign (mostly published in SAA 1, 5, and 15), the “Assyrian empire builders” web site created by K. Radner at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/sargon/>.
 - 16 Sources related to Sennacherib: Royal inscriptions: RINAP 3/1 and 3/2 (see also Luckenbill 1924, Frahm 1997, Frahm 2003, KAL 3: 84–6, and the overview in RIA 12: 15–16 (Frahm)). For a list of letters that may date to Sennacherib’s reign (they mostly deal with the situation in Babylonia during his first years), see Dietrich SAA 17: XXXVI–XXXVII, but note that some of these letters may actually belong to the reign of Sargon. References to the king: PNA 3/I: 1113–27 (Frahm). Historical sketches of his reign: Grayson 1991b: 103–22; Frahm 1997: 1–20; Frahm, RIA 12: 12–22; Grayson and Novotny, RINAP 3/1: 9–27, RINAP 3/2: 1–30. Frahm 2014 offers some “psychohistorical” reflections on Sennacherib and his

times.

- 17 Earlier, Dalley had suggested that Atalia was Sennacherib's mother, but by 2008, it had become clear that this was very unlikely. In fact, as recently established by Elnathan Weissert and the present author, Sennacherib's mother was most likely a woman named Ra'imâ (see Frahm 2014: 179–80).
- 18 Sources related to Esarhaddon: Royal inscriptions: RINAP 4 (see also Borger 1956). Oracle queries: SAA 4. Most of the letters from Esarhaddon's reign are edited in SAA 10, SAA 13, SAA 16, and SAA 18. References to the king: PNA 1/I: 146–52 (B. N. Porter and K. Radner). Historical sketch of his reign: Grayson 1991b: 122–41. For Esarhaddon's Babylonian politics, see Frame 1992: 64–101 and Porter 1993.
- 19 Sources related to Assurbanipal: Most of the royal inscriptions from his reign are edited in Streck 1916 and Borger 1996. Only portions of the correspondence from the king's reign are available in modern editions, including SAA 10, SAA 13, and SAA 18. References to Assurbanipal: PNA 1/I: 159–71 (E. Weissert et al.). Historical sketches of his reign: Grayson 1991c and Arnaud 2007. For Assurbanipal's Babylonian politics, see Frame 1992: 102–213.
- 20 The campaign is mentioned, *inter alia*, in two Late Babylonian copies of a letter sent by Šamaš-šumu-ukin to Assurbanipal; they are currently being prepared for publication by the present writer.
- 21 This date and the chronology of the following years remain debated among scholars. The problem is that the data recorded in the available sources cannot be entirely reconciled. The chronology used in this article follows Fuchs 2014 and is primarily based on archival documents. For other reconstructions, see the bibliographies in H. Schaudig's entries on Sîn-šarru-iškun and Sîn-šumu-lišir in RIA 12: 522–5.
- 22 For references to Sîn-šumu-lišir, see PNA 3/I: 1148 (R. Mattila); for a historical sketch, RIA 12: 524–5 (H. Schaudig). Some scholars (e.g., Da Riva 2001) date Sîn-šumu-lišir's reign to 626 and not 627. Note that Sîn-šumu-lišir's family background remains unknown and that it cannot be entirely excluded that he too was a member of the royal family.
- 23 Note that the identification between Kainai and Ashur, cautiously defended by Hauser (2011: 126), remains uncertain.
- 24 Similarly, the fall of the state of Akkad was blamed in later tradition on the great Akkad ruler Naram-Sîn – even though that king had likewise a number of (less impressive) successors.

CHAPTER 9

Economy, Society, and Daily Life in the Neo-Assyrian Period

Karen Radner

The Assyrian empire exercised its influence over an enormous number of people all over the Middle East, from Egypt to Iran, both inside and outside of the regions under direct control of provincial governors. When surveying the economy and society of the Neo-Assyrian period, we must therefore first appreciate the constitutive force of one of the empire's key strategies for achieving and maintaining control and cohesion: the large-scale practice of deportation that profoundly transformed the entire region's society and economy. We will then juxtapose the situation in the Assyrian heartland with that of the provinces and focus on the Nineveh region before turning our attention to the pastoralists operating within the empire. The chapter concludes with biographical sketches of a number of individuals who lived within the Neo-Assyrian empire in order to highlight specific social and economic circumstances as well as certain aspects of daily life.

The Crucible of Mass Deportation

While deportation is well-attested since the third millennium BCE, the Assyrian empire perfected the practice from the beginning of the “Reconquista” of the lost Assyrian territories in the west in the 10th century BCE onwards into an increasingly complex resettlement scheme that was implemented both inside and outside the regions under direct Assyrian control, not only in recently-submitted enemy counties (Oded 1979). Orchestrated by the central administration, population groups were systematically resettled in order to make the most of the resources of the entire empire while protecting the state by reducing the possibility of local rebellions fueled by patriotic resentment. The high degree of social, cultural, and economic homogeneity that characterizes the Neo-Assyrian period, despite the great climatic and geographical differences of the region (see [Chapter 1](#)), was the result of the deportations and became the most lasting legacy of the Assyrian empire.

Growing from the traditional practice of integrating conquered armies and populations into the native territory, the blueprint for these carefully-planned

migrations was developed in the ninth century BCE. Deportations gained momentum in the second half of the eighth century BCE with the massive expansion of the Assyrian state, which necessitated the integration of an area that exceeded the mother country in size. Organizing and implementing these population movements were among the most important tasks of the state and provincial administrators. In the course of the following centuries, more than 1.5 million individuals (following the conservative estimate of Oded 1979: 20) were relocated, either by simply transferring them from one region to another or by moving them in more complex patterns.

The imperial resettlement strategy is a frequent topic in the royal inscriptions, employing either a vocabulary of violence and pillage, fitting for the context of war, or the language of horticulture, which likens the deportees to precious trees that are uprooted and replanted in the best possible circumstances by that most conscientious of gardeners, the king of Assyria (Radner 2000). Just as a gardener transfers valuable plants to a nurturing new environment that the plants, in turn, would enhance, a key objective in the Assyrian resettlement strategy was to advance the agricultural infrastructure of the empire. The Assyrian heartland was a land of farmers and provided the template for the growing empire. The deportees were employed in the imperial mission to turn underdeveloped lands into fields and farms (cf. Kühne 2010: 120–6). Their task was to introduce new or hitherto-neglected cultivation techniques into all of the Assyrian provinces, including artificial irrigation, beekeeping, and the cultivation and processing of flax, fruit, wine, and olive oil. The beneficial effects of the Assyrian state on local economies are best understood in what is today Israel and in the Khabur Valley in northeastern Syria, where the intensive archaeological exploration of the past decades has brought to light the enormous economic transformation under Assyrian rule; obvious examples are the establishment of an olive oil industry at Ekron in the province of Ashdod (Gitin 1997; James 2006) and the creation of a canal system as a means of irrigation and transportation to support and enhance the Khabur River (Pucci 2010: 168).

The Assyrian state valued the deportees, their labor, and their abilities highly, and, therefore, their relocation was carefully planned and organized. We should not imagine treks of destitute fugitives that were easy prey for famine and disease; the deportees were meant to travel as comfortably and safely as possible in order to reach their destination in good physical shape. In Assyrian imperial art, deportees are shown as traveling in groups of men, women, and children, often riding on vehicles or animals, and never in bonds ([Figure 9.1](#)).



Figure 9.1 A family of deportees leaving a captured Babylonian city on an ox-cart: a man (boy?) and two women, one carrying a bag with her possessions. Detail from the wall decoration of Tiglath-pileser III's Central Palace in Kalḫu, later reused in Esarhaddon's Southwest Palace. British Museum, ANE 118882.

Source: by Karen Radner. Reproduced with permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

There is no inherent reason to doubt these depictions since Assyrian narrative art does not otherwise shy away from the graphic display of extreme violence and contemporary text sources support the notion that the deportees were treated well, e.g. in a letter of an Assyrian official to his king, Tiglath-pileser III (r. 745–727 BCE):

As for the Aramaeans about whom the king my lord wrote to me: “Prepare them for their journey!” I will give them their (travel) provisions, sackcloth, leather bags, sandals, and oil. My donkeys are not available, but if my donkeys were available, I would offer my carts too for the journey.

(SAA 19 17)

That the state continued to support the deportees once they had reached their destination is clear from another letter by the same author:

As to the Aramaeans about whom the king said: “They should be made to marry wives!” I have seen women in great numbers (there) but their fathers refuse to give them, saying: “Not until they give money to us.” Let money be given to them (the Aramaeans) so they can marry.

(SAA 19 18)

At least in the eyes of the state, the new arrivals were not to be treated differently from those whose families had lived on their land for generations. The legal owner of landed property was whoever worked the land and paid the taxes (Radner 2007a: 221–3). The state authorities actively encouraged intermixing among the new neighbors: the ultimate goal of the Assyrian

resettlement policy was to create a homogeneous population with a shared culture and a common identity, that of “Assyrians” (Oded 1979: 81–6; Machinist 1993).

Indeed, the Bible supports the Assyrian sources by highlighting how enforced resettlement could be seen in a positive light. When the Assyrian army laid siege upon the city of Jerusalem in 701 BCE, the envoys of King Sennacherib (r. 704–681 BCE) are said to have communicated the following message to the people of Jerusalem after urging them not to support their ruler, who refused to submit. This is what the Assyrian king promised:

“Make your peace with me and come out to me! Then every one of you will eat of his own vine, and every one of you will eat of his own fig tree, and every one of you will drink the water of his own cistern, until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey, that you may live, and not die!”

(2 Kings 18)

The chance to be resettled elsewhere in the Assyrian empire is presented here as a highly attractive privilege rather than as a punishment. People were, after all, not forced to leave on their own but rather with their families. They were not snatched away in the heat of battle or conquest, but chosen as the result of a deliberate selection process, often in the aftermath of a war that had, quite possibly, reduced their original home to ruins. When the Assyrian sources specify who precisely was to be relocated, they name the urban elites, the craftsmen, the specialists, and scholars (e.g. after the conquest of Memphis and Thebes in 671 BCE, see Radner 2009: 223–4). The decisions were made according to the needs of the state. While the goal was to create a carefully balanced population within the boundaries of Assyria, there is no reason to assume that such consideration was extended to any region that was not incorporated into the empire. Those who were taken away from these regions were not replaced, and the dire consequences for the economy and for communal life of places like Memphis in 671 BCE cannot be underestimated.

The vast majority of people, and certainly the most valuable experts, were dispatched to the Assyrian heartland in order to generate wealth and knowledge. Hence, by the beginning of the seventh century BCE, the cities in central Assyria, among them Nineveh and Ashur, housed specialists from all over the known world. Without them, some of the most lasting achievements of the Assyrian kings, such as constructing and furnishing the magnificent palaces and temples or assembling the contents of the fabled library of Assurbanipal (r. 668–631 BCE), would have been impossible.

The Heartland of Assyria

The core region of Assyria was roughly the triangle formed by three ancient cities: Ashur in the south, Nineveh in the north, and Arba'il in the east. Most of the regions within this triangle were situated east of the Tigris River in a physical environment favorable for agriculture, with good soil conditions and sufficient rainfall, as well as a number of streams and seasonal rivers providing reliable irrigation. There was one main harvest season per year, in autumn, when the grain (barley and wheat) was brought in from the fields.

The city of Ashur lies on the western riverbank and, thus, had access to and control over the important routes leading in the western direction to the Khabur Valley and to the Euphrates Valley. Situated at the fringes of the desert to the north of the artificially irrigated lands of Babylonia, Ashur was a natural contact point for the pastoralists that made use of this arid region. At the triangle's northern tip, Nineveh controlled an important ford across the Tigris River, like Ashur, but it lay on the eastern riverbank. It was the natural terminus of the overland route running along the southern foothills of the Taurus Mountain range that led to the Mediterranean coast and into Anatolia. The triangle's eastern tip, Arba'il, was located on the western fringes of the Zagros Mountain range and gave access to various routes across the mountains into Iran. The city was also located on the important route that led alongside the Zagros Mountains down to the Diyala River and into Babylonia, the key overland connection between central Assyria and the south. As the crow flies, the distance between Ashur and Arba'il is c. 105 kilometers, between Ashur and Nineveh c. 100 kilometers, and between Arba'il and Nineveh c. 80 kilometers.

This was the core of the Assyrian empire not only geographically and geopolitically, but also culturally; the main temples of the three cities were dedicated to the most important Assyrian deities – Assur, as whose earthly representative the Assyrian king acted, Ištar of Nineveh, and Ištar of Arba'il who, too, were celebrated as patrons and protectors of Assyria. As a praise poem composed for Assurbanipal in the deities' honor put it:

Exalt and glorify the Lady of Nineveh, magnify and praise the Lady of Arba'il, who have no equal among the great gods! ... Not [with] my [own strength], not with the strength of my bow, but with the power [... and] strength of my goddesses, I made the lands disobedient to me submit to the yoke of Assur ... The Lady of Nineveh, the mother who bore me, endowed me with unparalleled kingship; the Lady of Arba'il, my creator, ordered everlasting life (for me). They decreed as my fate to exercise dominion over all inhabited regions, and made their kings bow down at my feet.

(SAA 3 3: 1–3; rev. 4–6; rev. 14–18)

No king could afford to ignore these gods, their shrines, or their festivals. The

significance of their cults to Assyrian state ideology required the king to spend considerable amounts of time in these cities in order to take his place in their festivals, such as for the cult of Assur, which regularly required the king's attention and presence.

In 879 BCE, the city of Ashur was stripped of its ancient role as the seat of royal power and state administration when Aššurnasirpal II (r. 883–859 BCE) moved the court to a new location. His choice was the city of Kalḫu, which was transformed into the political and administrative center of Assyria during his reign and that of his son and successor Shalmaneser III (r. 858–824 BCE). Kalḫu was an old city and, crucially, an integral part of the regional traffic network. It was situated in a uniquely central position between Ashur, Nineveh, and Arba'il, since the most convenient routes that linked these cities all led through it (Altaweel 2008: 66–8, 116). Traveling to and from either of these cities, therefore, required a day or two at most, depending on the direction and the mode of travel, which was about half the time it took to cover the distance between any of the three cities. The ancient town of Kalḫu became a megacity with a surface area of 380 hectares contained within the city walls and regional canal systems that were constructed in order to provide additional water for its maintenance (Altaweel 2008: 86–8, 121). The creation of this new center influenced settlement patterns not only in the heartland but also, due to the necessity of procuring settlers, all over the empire.

When Kalḫu was elevated to its new prominence, it was not only at the expense of Ashur but also at the expense of Nineveh and Arba'il. Given Ashur's peripheral location within the Assyrian state, the latter two cities were effectively economic and political centers in their own right, of almost the same importance as Ashur. By choosing Kalḫu as the administrative center of the renewed Assyrian state, the influence of all three cities and their inhabitants within the state was substantially weakened – a strategy designed to strengthen the position of the king at the expense of the traditional urban elites. While these elites had previously played an important role in the political life of the Assyrian state, the highest administrative and military offices were now reserved for eunuchs of deliberately obscure origins who were undoubtedly loyal to the king. The residents of the new center of state, and especially the royal court, were handpicked from among the urban elites by one of these eunuchs, as the royal edict appointing Nergal-apil-kumu'a to oversee the move to Kalḫu makes abundantly clear (SAA 12 83). We can safely assume that only those who had shown enthusiasm for the king and his plans for Assyria were chosen, thus creating in 879 BCE not only a new political center but also one that was exclusively populated by loyal supporters of the king.

The Provinces

Compared to the rest of the empire, the provinces in the Assyrian heartland were small in size (Figure 9.2). This reflects historical developments, since the provinces in the oldest part of the state had been established at a much earlier time and had survived from the Middle Assyrian Period (Radner 2006) in most cases unchanged, although they were sometimes merged with a neighboring province into a larger unit (e.g. Ashur and Libbi-ali; Nineveh and Ḫalahḫu). Although the land controlled by these provinces was much more limited than that of the new provinces created in the ninth and, especially, in the eighth century BCE, it was intensely developed agricultural land with very little surface taken up by deserts or mountains, unlike elsewhere in the empire. That grain prices in Nineveh and Ḫalahḫu, probably as the result of the much higher demand in the densely populated heartland, were nevertheless considerably higher than in the western provinces (“the steppe”), where rain-fed agriculture was supplemented with irrigation through long-distance canal systems, is positively emphasized in a letter to Tiglath-pileser III:

The land of the king is well. The royal sustenance fields have been harvested. The market rate is extremely favorable in the land. One homer of barley (=100 liters) goes for one mina of copper in Nineveh (and is worth as much as) one homer and five seahs (=150 liters) in Ḫalahḫu and two homers (=200 liters) in the steppe. Forty minas of wool (go for) one mina of copper.

(SAA 19 19)

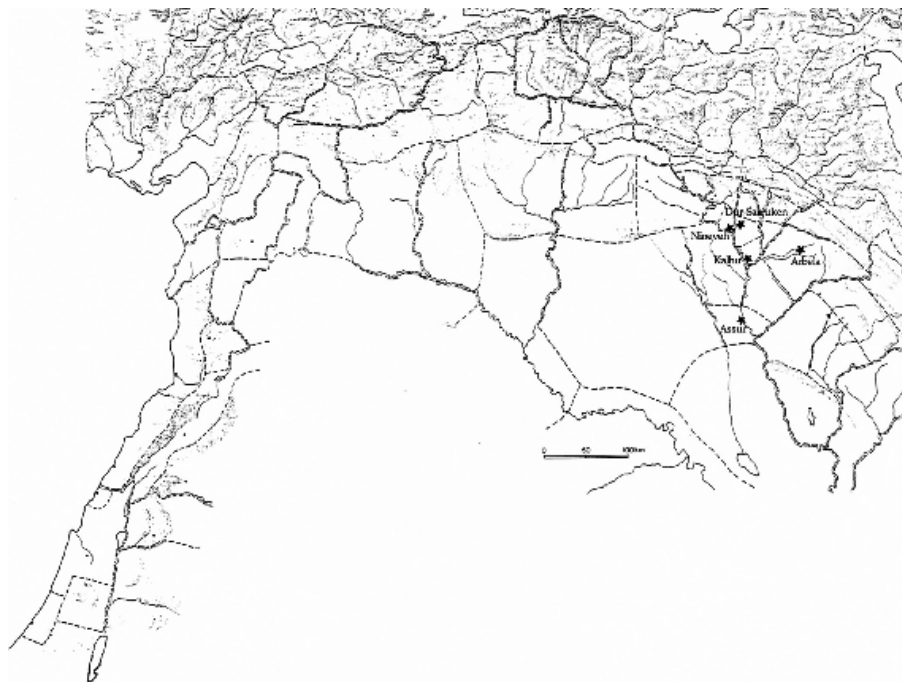


Figure 9.2 The Neo-Assyrian provinces, with the position of Ashur, Nineveh, Arba'il, Kalḥu, and Dur-Šarrukin marked by asterisks. The dashed lines indicate the provincial boundaries, but note that these are often hypothetical. For details see Radner 2006.

Drawing by Cornelia Wolff after a sketch by the author.

As far as we can see, all Assyrian governors were expected to provide the central administration with the same contributions in taxes and in labor, regardless of the size of their province; this emerges most clearly in the records of the construction of Dur-Šarrukin (cf. Parpola 1995). This would seem to indicate that, at least in theory, all provinces were expected to have roughly the same economic potential. The exceptions were the border marches under the control of some of the highest military officials in empire: the commander-in-chief (*turtānu*), the treasurer (*masennu*), the cupbearer (*rab šāqê*), and the palace herald (*nāgir ekalli*). These were located in strategically sensitive border regions along the upper stretches of the Euphrates, the Tigris, the Lesser (Iraqi) Khabur, and the Great Zab Rivers (Radner 2006: 48–9). These heavily militarized zones were dedicated to the defense of the Assyrian state against its arch-enemy to the north, Urartu, and its allies. Economic development was certainly considered secondary there as long as there was the danger of war. Some of the other provinces' primary function was to generate trade with the neighboring regions (Radner 2004). This is clear in the case of the provinces of Sidon (established in 677 BCE; maritime trade across the entire Mediterranean Sea and surveillance of the trading activities of the vassals Tyre and Arwad) and Ashdod (established in 711 BCE; trade with Egypt and the Arabian peninsula) and the provinces in Median territory, which were collectively known as *bēt kāri* "House of trade" (established in 744 and 716 BCE; trade with the east along the Silk Route). After the conquest of Carchemish and the sacking of its state treasury in 717 BCE, the influx of vast quantities of silver caused a change from the copper standard, previously favored in the Assyrian empire, to a silver standard (Radner 1999: 131).

In general, the Assyrian administration established in a newly annexed region would, at first, face considerable expenditures in order to secure Assyrian rule and to set up the necessary infrastructure: the construction of a provincial center, the reorganization of the local settlement structure (cf. Wilkinson and Barbanes 2000; Radner and Schachner 2004: 117–18), the linking up with the imperial information network (Radner 2014), and the enhancement of the agricultural potential of the land by introducing additional manpower and often also new agricultural techniques and, wherever possible, by means of irrigation projects (especially in the steppe regions of Syria).

But once these infrastructural changes had been achieved, a large province could be divided into smaller units. For example, the holdings of the once enormous province of Rašappa were split up into several provinces after its

previously largely barren lands were cultivated (Radner 2006: 52–3). Similarly, Sargon II (r. 721–705 BCE) created the provinces of Til-Barsip and Harran out of the border march of the commander-in-chief, formed in 856 BCE and originally encompassing all lands west of the Khabur River as far as the Euphrates River (Radner 2006: 48).

If our hypothesis is correct, then the economic power of the small, central Assyrian provinces equaled that of the much larger Syrian, Anatolian, or Iranian provinces. Given the importance of human labor, it stands to reason that the core provinces, therefore, had to be far more densely populated. This correlates with the fact that the Assyrian heartland was the destination for most of the deported populations (Oded 1979: 28, 116–35). In addition, the large-scale irrigation projects reduced the insecurities of rain-fed agriculture and, as Ur (2005: 343) argues, increased productivity substantially by allowing a more intensive production of winter grain and water-intensive summer vegetable crops, and by reducing the need for biennial fallow.

However, by the reign of Sargon II, the governorship over a central Assyrian province was no longer the pinnacle of a successful career in the state administration that it had once been. It was far more prestigious to govern one of the new provinces, whereas the governorship over a central Assyrian province represented an earlier, more junior stage in an official's career. This is clear from the career paths of some of Sargon's officials: Šep-Aššur, for instance, was first governor of Dur-Šarrukīn and was then promoted to govern Šimīrra on the Phoenician Coast (SAA 1 124), whereas Nabû-bel-ka'in (Postgate and Mattila 2004: 251–2 with n. 50) was first governor of Arrapha (modern Kirkuk) and then of the Median province of Kar-Šarrukīn before he was promoted to vizier (*sukallu*), one of the most senior state offices. That the more experienced governors now ruled over the newly annexed and distant provinces is also reflected by changes in the sequence of year eponyms (Millard 1994). From at least the reign of Aššurnāširpal II onwards, there was a specific sequence in place, according to which the king, the most senior state officials, and some provincial governors, including those of the core provinces, took on this prestigious role. But, under Sargon, we find that it was the governors of the newly annexed provinces, rather than those ruling the core provinces, who were made eponym, and this trend continued under Sargon's successors.

It made good political sense to dispatch only the officials who had already proven their worth and their loyalty to the king to postings far away from the court and the central administration, and, therefore, far away from the Assyrian core region. There was a general shift of the attention of the king and his administration away from the heartland, the almost unavoidable result of the rapid extension of the provincial system during the second half of the eighth century BCE.

The Nineveh Region

This regional power shift away from the heartland is also reflected by the move of the political and administrative center of the empire away from Kalḫu to the Nineveh region (first to Dur-Šarrukin under Sargon II and then to Nineveh itself under Sennacherib), the starting point for the principal route to the increasingly more important western half of the empire. The successive annexation of the lands on the Mediterranean Sea coast and north of the Taurus Mountains under Tiglath-pileser III, Shalmaneser V (r. 726–722 BCE), and Sargon II had turned the route along the southern Taurus foothills into the empire's most important overland connection; and all goods, people, and information travelling on it passed through Nineveh, which controlled the principal ford over the Tigris River in this region. The expansion made Nineveh the hub of the Assyrian empire.

However, since Sargon's new foundation, Dur-Šarrukin, principally used resources previously under the control of Nineveh – most importantly agricultural lands, personnel, and water – the move curtailed Nineveh's economic potential. Sargon's relocation of the royal court and the central state administration can be seen as a reaction to the geopolitical changes brought about by the growth of the empire in the previous decades and the resulting increase in Nineveh's nationwide importance. Yet it is obvious that this ruler, whose early reign was severely threatened by rebellions, including many in the heartland, did not want to forego the political opportunities offered by founding a new and “disembedded” power base. The creation of an entirely new city went hand in hand with the establishment of a corresponding province at the expense of nearby Nineveh (and perhaps also Kalḫu), a strategy designed to counter and lessen Nineveh's, and also Kalḫu's, regional political and economic importance. The court moved to Dur-Šarrukin in 706 BCE but, when Sargon died on the battlefield in the following year, his son and successor Sennacherib (r. 704–681 BCE) chose to abandon the city and move his court and the central administration to Nineveh, which was greatly expanded for this purpose. Since the geopolitical advantages of a move from Dur-Šarrukin to Nineveh are obvious, we must at least ask the question of whether Sennacherib would still have moved to Nineveh if his father had not died in a way that tainted his new city (Frahm 1999; Fuchs 2009, 59–60). I believe this is a distinct possibility. Sennacherib was, unlike Sargon, uncontested in his claim to the throne and, thus, the old urban elites of central Assyria would have appeared to be less of a danger to his royal power than they would have seemed to his father.

In the seventh century BCE, cities like Ashur and Arba'il retained their cultural importance, as emphasized by the hymn quoted above. Yet in

comparison to Nineveh, the seat of royal power and the heart of the empire, these cities were now perceived as peripheral and provincial, not as equals to the great city and not so different from other regional centers in the empire. Nineveh's new size was gigantic by ancient standards: with 750 hectares enclosed by fortification walls, the city boasted more than twice the area of the already enormous cities of Kalḫu (380 hectares) and Dur-Šarrukin (315 hectares).

Despite adding no new provinces to the Assyrian state, Sennacherib had more people moved across the empire than any of his predecessors (or any of his successors, for that matter) had; on the basis of his inscriptions, Sennacherib resettled close to half a million people, and almost half of them came from Babylonia (Oded 1979: 20–1). Most deportees were destined for Nineveh, whose newly expanded size called for additional settlers. The move to Nineveh and its enlargement was accompanied by the construction of an extensive network of water reservoirs, canals, and aqueducts (Ur 2005) designed to release the water from seasonal northern rivers – such as the Rubar Dohuk and Gomel, which only carry water after the spring snowmelt – gradually and year-round to Nineveh, guaranteeing sufficient water supplies for the new megacity and its inhabitants.

Just as Aššurnāṣirpal II had personnel transferred from Ashur to Kalḫu almost two centuries earlier, the empire's specialists, among them “exorcists, physicians, augurs, [...], carpenters, goldsmiths, smiths” (in a fragmentary catalog: Frahm 1997: 158 no. 69+), were moved to Nineveh and the city became the favorite stomping ground for the empire's cultural elite. Note, for example, the irritated reaction of a scholar in the royal entourage upon learning that he was to return to Ashur:

Concerning what the crown prince, my lord, wrote to me, saying: “Why are you here? Move on and go to the Inner City (= Ashur)” – it is now the second time that the crown prince suddenly writes (like this). It is not time for the sacrifices, and there is no ritual and nothing that would make them send for me hastily. Why the same thing again?

(SAA 13 158)

Until the reign of Sargon, we may very well argue that the Assyrian heartland, as a whole, was considered the center of the growing empire while the provinces provided opportunities for eager state officials to distinguish themselves by transforming the land in their care into an integral part of Assyria. With the foundation of Dur-Šarrukin and, especially, with the elevation of Nineveh into the capital city, this situation changed for good. By the seventh century BCE, the great city on the Tigris River was the place to be for all those who were eager to shape the empire and to enjoy its fruits. The provincial governors' position within the state hierarchy diminished steadily as Sennacherib and his successors shifted power away from them to the

members of the king's immediate family and his attendants (Radner 2008: 510; cf. Mattila 2009). Nineveh and its royal court emerged as the unrivalled center of the empire.

Farmers and Pastoralists

While the vast majority of the regions within the Assyrian empire were used as farmland, we must not forget the pastoralists who used the mountain meadows in the Zagros and Taurus Mountain regions as well as the steppe to graze their herds. The former environment was used by transhumant shepherds, who led their flocks according to an annual routine along established, seasonal routes from summer to winter pastures; this has been studied for the Zagros province of Mazamua (or Zamua), corresponding to the Shahrizor plain and the mountain ranges enclosing it, in Iraqi Kurdistan (Greco 2003). The steppe, on the other hand, was exploited not only by transhumant shepherds associated with agricultural settlements in the farming belt but also by nomadic pastoralists who moved across large areas without following a predetermined pattern. The Assyrian economy depended on pastoralism, since the wool from the sheep provided the main raw material for the important textile industry and since mutton was the most commonly consumed meat.

As we have seen, the role of the city of Ashur changed considerably in the course of the first quarter of the first millennium BCE but, as the only central Assyrian city situated on the western bank of the Tigris River, it always functioned as the key contact point between the Assyrian state and the pastoralist tribes that roamed the Jezirah, the arid region between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, with their herds of sheep and camels. By the eighth century BCE, Arab tribes had penetrated deep into the Syrian desert and the Jezirah with the permission of the Assyrian authorities, who needed their goodwill in order to protect their economic interests along the empire's southern borders in the desert zone stretching from the Mediterranean Sea coast to the Persian Gulf. The tribes and their herds were given the use of the steppe lands between the Assyrian farming belt and the desert (cf. Fales 2002). But when the steppe could not provide enough resources for their survival, the pastoralists would quickly become opportunistic raiders and threaten the nearby settlements. Since this severely upset the fragile, but important, relations between Assyria and the tribes, it was in the state's best interest to find good grazing grounds for the pastoralists, as illustrated by a letter exchange between King Sargon II and ʿAb-šil-Ešarra, the governor of Ashur. The king had ordered him to lead the Arabs to Ḫinzanu (Ḫindanu), on the eastern bank of the Euphrates River and in the region of the modern border between Syria and Iraq, and allow them to graze there, stipulating

Suḥu (i.e. the region along the Euphrates between the modern Iraqi cities Jabriyeh and Ramadi) as the southern border and the Wadi Tharthar as the eastern border of their grazing grounds. This is the governor's reply:

As to the Arabs about whom the king, my lord wrote to me: "Why do they graze their sheep and camels in the desert where they must resort to plundering when hungry?" Rains have been scarce this year; they had to settle in [the desert].

As to what the king, my lord, wrote to me: "Now, go to Ḫinzanu, and let them go and graze with you! There shall be no restrictions from the banks of the Wadi Tharthar up to the land of Suḥu!" I will now go to Ḫinzanu, but they (are sure to) leave the territory I am assigning to them, move further downstream and plunder; they pay absolutely no heed to the chief scout I have appointed.

Let them order the governor of Kalḫu to appoint one of his eunuchs and put the Arabs under his jurisdiction; they should then ask me for a territory where to graze. All the same, their tents should remain in the territory of the governor of Kalḫu while they are grazing [elsewhere].

They plunder settlements. They never plunder sheep or camels but they do kidnap people.

(SAA 1 82)

Ṭab-ṣil-Ešarra was not happy with the king's order since he considered it unlikely that the Arabs would stay in the assigned territory, presumably because he knew the grazing conditions there would be inadequate. He predicted that they would move further south, into Babylonia, and would plunder there. We know from another of his letters (SAA 1 84) that the northern Babylonian city of Sippar was targeted by Arabs at the time. His alternative was to move the Arabs northwards into the province of Kalḫu, which means that they would have been relocated to the other bank of the Tigris River. There, they would find enough grazing for their herds while their ability to move freely would have been severely restricted by the tributaries of the Tigris River, which would, in turn, keep them exactly where the Assyrians wanted them to be. Although Ṭab-ṣil-Ešarra suggested that the Arabs could also graze their herds elsewhere, he insisted that their camps should be established in the province of Kalḫu. In this way, the families of the herders would have served as hostages, guaranteeing the good behavior of those herders who could not always be watched closely. By establishing a permanent base for the Arab pastoralists, Ṭab-ṣil-Ešarra, in effect, intended to change their lifestyle from free-roaming "true" nomadism to transhumance. Ṭab-ṣil-Ešarra's suggestion also indicates that it was quite late in the year, after the grain harvests from the intensely used agricultural zone of Kalḫu had already been brought in: even today, shepherds graze their herds around Kalḫu after harvest time.

Four Vignettes of Neo-Assyrian Life

The following biographical sketches are meant to illustrate the diversity of living conditions in the Assyrian empire. They have two things in common: they all date to the seventh century BCE, the period when our sources are most numerous, and they all are situated in an urban context. This is not coincidental since the available sources come overwhelmingly from the cities, rather than from the countryside, and tend to concern themselves with matters of urban life. I have selected a millionaire landowner and military officer, two scholars from Assyria's leading learned family, a slave woman who had been abducted from a foreign country, and the head of a firm of wine importers. The entries in *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Radner and Baker 1998–2011) provide textual references for these and many other Assyrians.

A very rich and influential man

Šulmu-šarri's archive (Radner 2002; Röllig 2014) was excavated from the ruins of a stately home in Dur-Katlimmu on the Khabur River, known today as the "Red House" (Kreppner and Schmid 2013) after the color of the wall decoration in the western wing of the building. The archive consists of about 150 cuneiform tablets and some fifty Aramaic clay dockets, all of them private legal documents that give us a great deal of information about the economic situation of Šulmu-šarri's household.

Šulmu-šarri was active throughout the reign of Assurbanipal and, in the last part of the king's reign, when Šulmu-šarri was certainly at least fifty years of age, he was promoted to the distinguished position of a royal confidant (*ša qurbūte*, literally "he who is close"), which would have allowed him to represent the king in confidential matters all over the empire (Postgate 2007: 342–3). We do not know what his original professional title was, although a fragmentary text reveals that he was at some point attached to the crown prince, presumably the future king Aššur-etel-ilani (Radner 2002 no. 86). However, it is virtually certain that he was a high-ranking military commander: most of his associates held military titles and, in the seventh century BCE, Dur-Katlimmu was a garrison town that harbored contingents of the Assyrian chariot corps and intelligence service.

Like many who enjoyed the king's favor, Šulmu-šarri was a very rich man. We are informed only about those properties that he bought and whose purchase documents survive; this amounts to eight fields, three gardens, and three houses and agricultural buildings in and around Dur-Katlimmu. From a

court record dealing with a crime committed there, we also know that he owned an entire village in the border march of the cupbearer (in the region of Aqra in northeastern Iraq, Radner 2002 no. 71). We can be certain that he had additional estates, some perhaps granted to him by the king. The “Red House” itself is testament to his wealth: with a living space of 5,400 meters², this enormous building consisted of three separate parts arranged around three paved courtyards. Four staircases indicate that parts of the building had a second floor. The main entrance led into the administrative wing in the north of the building, which offered ample storage facilities, some even refrigerated. The representative wing was situated in the east and the private wing in the west of the building, the latter with two wells. A central reception hall connected the three parts and regulated access to the eastern and western wings. There were several kitchen areas and four bathrooms, all connected to the complex sewage system (Kreppner and Schmid 2013). Šulmu-šarri and his family shared this house with numerous slaves; within three decades, he bought more than fifty of them, two-thirds of whom were women (often a mother and her young daughter). The remains of horizontal looms along the walls of the courtyards of the “Red House” provide evidence for domestic textile work, the necessary wool for which was provided by the shepherds in Šulmu-šarri’s employ, who grazed their flocks in the Jezirah.

Šulmu-šarri had three sons: Šamaš-aḥḥe-iddina, Nabû-ili, and Nabû-ušur. We do not know anything about their mother but it is a possibility that she was a relative, perhaps the sister, of Šulmu-šarri’s close associate Raḥimi-il, an officer in the chariot corps; some of his tablets were found as part of Šulmu-šarri’s archive. The sons inherited their father’s estate after he died sometime during the reign of Assurbanipal’s second successor, Sîn-šarru-iškun (r. 627–612 BCE), most likely of old age. His grave’s location is not known; it is certain that there was no underground tomb attached to the “Red House,” although such structures are attested elsewhere in Dur-Katlimmu, albeit during an earlier period (late tenth/early ninth century BCE, Kreppner and Hornig 2010). Perhaps he was buried elsewhere in the city or at another one of his estates. The activities of Šulmu-šarri’s heirs are documented in a few texts found in the “Red House,” proving his family’s continuing connection with this building, even during and after the disintegration of the Assyrian empire. One text (Radner 2002 no. 199) dates to the period just after 612 BCE and contains important evidence for the political situation in Dur-Katlimmu at the time: the population was still loyal to the Assyrian crown but local power rested now in the hands of a “city lord” rather than the previously well-attested members of the regular city administration.

The disappointed scions of Assyria’s leading learned family

We have already emphasized that relocating the administrative and political center to a new city, in conjunction with the influx of new population groups, resulted in a weakening of the influence of the former urban elites over the king. The fate of the cousins Šumaya and Urdu-Gula illustrates this point.

Contemporaries of kings Esarhaddon (r. 681–669 BCE) and Assurbanipal, the cousins were members of Assyria's foremost family of scholars. Since their ancestor, Gabbu-ilani-ereš, had been master scholar (*ummānu*), the most prominent position a man of learning could aspire to in Assyria, to kings Tukulti-Ninurta II (r. 890–884 BCE) and Aššurnāṣirpal II, the family was closely connected to the Assyrian crown and enjoyed royal patronage and prestigious appointments at court. Originally from Ashur, Gabbu-ilani-ereš moved as part of Aššurnāṣirpal's entourage to Kalḫu, where the family flourished. The grandfather of Šumaya and Urdu-Gula was Nabû-zuqup-kenu, who contributed numerous manuscripts of literary and scholarly works to the Assyrian royal library, most famously a copy of the twelfth tablet of the Gilgameš Epic, which he wrote in response to the death of his master, Sargon II, on the battlefield (Frahm 1999). His sons, Nabû-zeru-lešir and Adad-šumu-ušur, were favorites of Esarhaddon. The first was chief scribe and, like his ancestor Gabbu-ilani-ereš, master scholar, while his brother held the prominent appointment of the king's personal exorcist. Nabû-zeru-lešir was succeeded as chief scribe by his son Issar-šumu-ereš, who also served under King Assurbanipal, but his other son, Šumaya, and his nephew, Urdu-Gula, who were both trained as exorcists, failed to achieve permanent positions in the royal entourage. They both wrote petitions to Assurbanipal that were meant to change their fortunes for the better but, unfortunately, did not succeed in securing his favor. These letters contain some of the most detailed descriptions of individual economic and social circumstances in the Assyrian empire, and it is therefore worthwhile to quote them.

Šumaya wrote twice to the then crown prince Assurbanipal after his father, the master scholar Nabû-zeru-lešir, had died, saddling him with inherited debts:

My father owed the king a thousand (homers) of barley. Now of that (sum) I have already paid 400 (homers) of barley but I still owe the remaining 600 (homers) of barley. ... I have appealed to the crown prince, my lord. May the crown prince, my lord, not leave me in the lurch, but do something!

(SAA 16 35)

Here, he seems reasonably confident that the crown prince would help him to repay his debts to the king. But Assurbanipal was apparently not interested in Šumaya's well-being, despite the fact that Šumaya used to work at the crown prince's residence in Tarbišu. A second letter is rather more desperate in tone

and reminds the crown prince of his family's long association with the royal house, demanding that he be recognized like his father and grandfather before him. In this letter, Esarhaddon is held up as a role model who would not have hesitated to do right by Šumaya – Šumaya's employment, unfortunately, was with Assurbanipal, who appeared less keen about protecting this scion of an ancient learned family and his interests:

The king, your father, saw the work that I did in Tarbišu. I did it carefully, thinking: "May my name be good before my lord." ... The king, my lord, did not give me a house nor silver for the rest of the work. Now, if it is acceptable to the crown prince, let them settle my accounts, let the crown prince hand over the work, and let me do the work in Kalḫu assigned to my father (= Nabû-zeru-lešir) and deliver it to the crown prince. Nobody listens to me. (Should) it come to pass that I become a nobody before the crown prince, I will die. If only the crown prince, my lord, would turn his attention to me, I would perform the works of the crown prince and deliver them to the crown prince, my lord. If I did not do it, who would do them and deliver them to the crown prince? ... May the crown prince, my lord, live forever, and may I revere the crown prince, my lord, with my arms and feet! The crown prince, my lord, may enquire: Did the eunuch Aššur-beluka" in not stand by my grandfather (= Nabû-zuqup-kenu)? Afterwards, when your grandfather (= Sennacherib) ascended the throne, did he not appoint him to the position of a scribe? Now, may the crown prince, my lord, not forsake me! May the name of his grandfather and the position of my father not be lost from your house! My father and my grandfather served in your household. The king, your father, loves the son of one who did his (= the king's) work, feels concern for the son of one who did his work. What is my crime? I am a dog of the crown prince, lurking at the threshold of your house. May the crown prince, my lord, not forsake me!

(SAA 16 34)

But Šumaya was not the only of Nabû-zuqup-kenu's grandsons who fell out of favor with Assurbanipal. His cousin, Urdu-Gula, too, was cold-shouldered by Assurbanipal, who was now king of Assyria:

I used to receive gifts from him (= King Esarhaddon), and my name was mentioned among men of good fortune. I used to enjoy generous regular handouts; on occasion he used to give me a mule or an ox, and every year I received a mina or two of silver. [In the days] when my lord was crown prince, I received regular handouts with your (other) exorcists. ... Now, succeeding his father, the king my lord has added to the good name he (= Esarhaddon) had established, but I have not been treated in accordance with my deeds. I have suffered as never before and lost spirit. ... If it is befitting that established scholars and (their) deputies receive mules, I should be granted a donkey; likewise, oxen are apportioned in the tenth

month (December/January) and I too should [receive] an ox! ... It is now two years since the two beasts of mine died. I have walked three times to Arba'il and once to Ashur, but has anyone showed me any compassion by taking me by the hand or [leading me] into the presence of the king my lord? Why did the king summon an exorcist from Ekallatum, while I had to take to the desert roads because of people asking me: "Why do you go on foot?" People pass my house, the established (scholars) on sedans, the deputies on carts, the apprentices on mules, and I have to walk! Perhaps the king will say: "He is a son of the country." The king can ask (anyone): My father (= Adad-šumu-ušur) portioned out 6 homers of farmland with his brother Nabû-zeru-lešir. I and my brother received three homers each, and in addition two persons. By the grace of the king my lord I have been gifted (another) five or six people. I have visited the Kidmuru temple (of the goddess Ištar in Kalḫu in order to pray for children) and arranged a banquet, (yet) my wife has embarrassed me: for five years (she has been) neither dead nor alive (i.e. no pregnancy, not even a stillbirth), and I have no son. This year three women have fallen to me. But I have no farm workers, no farm equipment, no farm. ... I cannot (even) afford a pair of sandals or the wages of a tailor, I have no spare suit of clothes, and I have incurred debts of almost six minas of silver, plus the interest. Also, I am of advanced years and they say: "Once you have reached old age, who will support you?"

(SAA 10 294)

Urdu-Gula professes to be ashamed of the way he had to live. With only a small plot of land and servants in short supply, without a suitable means of transport, and forced to wear old clothes, he is the laughingstock of the scholars who enjoy the king's favor, or so he imagines. Of course, although his situation was a far cry from the royal confidant Šulmu-šarri's wealthy circumstances, Urdu-Gula was certainly not a poor man. But being accustomed to a more affluent situation had led him to incur debts of (at least) three times his former annual income at court. He bitterly laments the loss of the days when King Esarhaddon favored him and implores Assurbanipal to accept him back into the royal entourage, which would, of course, have remedied his financial problems quickly. Any of his contemporaries could have related to his despair in lacking a son and heir (which he blames on his barren wife) and the resulting worry about who would take care of him in old age. If the sacrifices to the goddess Ištar continued to fail to yield results, and his wife's previous failure to become pregnant would make this seem likely, Urdu-Gula would probably have resolved this increasingly urgent problem by adopting a suitable boy (Radner 2004: 897). In the context of this letter, Urdu-Gula clearly expects this line of argument to prompt Assurbanipal to step in and offer to take care of him.

Why did these two men, despite their education and their excellent pedigree,

not enjoy the privileged position at court, with all of the associated material benefits, which they clearly expected to be rightly theirs? During Esarhaddon's reign, the Assyrian court saw the arrival of highly qualified scholars from Babylonia (see SAA 10 160) and Egypt (Radner 2009: 223), many of whom were accepted into the royal entourage. The competition for the king's favor among the members of the Assyrian scholarly establishment was suddenly fiercer than ever. Men like Šumaya and Urdu-Gula, who grew up expecting to succeed in their ancestors' footsteps and find relatively easy acceptance into the royal entourage, were bitterly disappointed – they were victims of the Assyrian resettlement strategy, albeit in a very different way than the woman Nanaya-ila'i, whom we shall discuss next.

An enslaved war captive

During most of the reign of Assurbanipal, Assyria was in a permanent state of war with the kingdom of Elam and, between 664 and 648 BCE, frequently invaded and plundered the enemy's territory. A legal text from Ashur (edited and discussed by Faist 2009; the date is lost) documents the fate of one woman and her daughter, who were caught up in the war and taken from Elam to Assyria as war captives. In the document recording their sale for one mina of silver, an average price for the mid seventh century BCE, the women are described as “booty from Elam whom the king has given to Libbi-ali (= city of Ashur).” In the aftermath of a battle, the spoils, including human captives, were distributed among the victors according to established conventions. In a letter to the governor of Kalḫu (CTN 2 194) under Tiglath-pileser III, his representative reported that he selected thirty captives after one battle in Babylonia and ten more after another. The further fortunes of such prisoners of war are normally not recorded in our sources and the case of the Elamite captives, Nanaya-ila'i and her young daughter, is therefore a very rare concrete example concerning the effects of war on women (Kuhrt 2001).

The contract's date is lost, but it is likely that the woman and her child were snatched during the sack of Susa in 646 BCE, when enormous amounts of booty were captured. After they reached Ashur as part of the booty contingent reserved for that city, our text documents that Nanaya-ila'i and her daughter were sold by ten men, who owned them jointly, to one Mannu-ki-Aššur. The ten sellers, identified by name and profession, were a diverse group of temple craftsmen, including a baker, a cook, a weaver, a goldsmith, an ironsmith, and a shepherd. Although they were, of course, all affiliates of the Assur temple, they had little in common otherwise. However, since there are ten of them and military matters link them to the captives from Elam, we may assume that they constituted (part of) a unit (*kišru*, literally “knot”) and were jointly responsible for fulfilling their work obligations to the state, including military

service (Postgate 2007: 344–5). If this hypothesis is accepted, then it is feasible that they participated as a group in one of the military campaigns against Elam, as part of the contingent from Ashur, and received the Elamite woman and her young daughter as their joint reward from among the battle spoils reserved for Ashur. Nanaya-ila'i would have received her Akkadian name ("The goddess Nanaya is my deity") only after she had come into Assyrian captivity. Her name was a deliberate reference to the fact that Assurbanipal's conquest of Elam had also resulted in the celebrated repatriation of an ancient cult statue of Nanaya, which had been abducted over a millennium ago to Elam (van Koppen 2013: 380). As owning the slaves jointly was of limited practical use to the individual men, selling them and dividing the proceeds was the obvious solution. We must therefore assume that the sale took place soon after the sack of Susa and once the Elamite women had arrived in Ashur.

Whatever their original social background in Elam, Nanaya-ila'i and her daughter would have spent the rest of their lives as domestic slaves, contributing to the everyday running of the household of their master by grinding flour, baking, cooking, and cleaning or, if they were gifted, adding to the household's prosperity by spinning wool and weaving textiles that could be sold at a profit. On the whole, their existence would have been a quiet one, undoubtedly a relief after the shock of their wartime abduction to Assyria. But, unless she died early, e.g. during childbirth, as happened so frequently, Nanaya-ila'i's daughter would have had to witness another invasion, the conquest of Ashur in 614 BCE, and she may well have been claimed as booty for a second time in her life, this time by the Median army.

The bon-vivants of Ashur

With our final sketch, we stay in Ashur and, in an attempt to link the activities of the city's inhabitants in the seventh century BCE to the well-documented trading enterprises of their remote ancestors in the Old Assyrian Period (see [Chapter 4](#)), I have chosen a man called Duri-Aššur as the object of our attention: he was the head of a trading firm based at Ashur and resided in a generously-appointed building offering about 150 meters² of living space. While this building was tiny compared to Šulmu-šarri's gigantic Dur-Katlimmu mansion, in the context of the densely built-up city of Ashur, this is a house of average size.¹ We can assume that the Elamite war captive, Nanaya-ila'i, and her daughter lived in a household of similar size. Duri-Aššur's firm was one of many private trading companies operating in Ashur. A family of Western Iranian origin was very active in the same period (Radner 2007b: 196–7), and it is very likely that their members exploited their roots in Iran for their commercial dealings.

As we learn from the letters and lists found in his private archive (Radner 2016), Duri-Aššur organized trading ventures into the northern regions of Assyria with three partners (“brothers”) in the period of 651–614 BCE; that is, until the Medes conquered the city of Ashur. Some of his letters had not yet been opened when Duri-Aššur’s house went up in flames. The ensuing wars certainly terminated the firm’s activities – and we can, of course, assume that trade in general, on a large geographical scale, was badly affected during the next decade while the spoils from the Assyrian empire were gradually divided up between the marauding Babylonian, Median, and Egyptian armies.

Throughout the period that his business flourished, during the reign of Assurbanipal and his successors, Duri-Aššur seems to have stayed in the city of Ashur while his partners did the traveling in order to arrange and to oversee their joint business activities. Duri-Aššur and his partners employed four agents as caravan leaders, and these men conducted three trips a year, leading a group of donkeys upstream along the Tigris River with merchandise from Ashur that included exclusive garments, like hats and shoes, and textiles, which also served as packing material for the supplies and the silver funds. One letter names Zamaḥu in the Jebel Sinjar as a destination, a city famous for its wines. Zamaḥu may have been the usual destination of Duri-Aššur’s caravans – why vary the route if one had a reliable network of suppliers and business partners in one place? Once the caravan had reached its destination, everything was sold, including the donkeys, and Duri-Aššur’s agents bought wine from the proceeds and the funds that they had brought with them. Among the well-heeled inhabitants of Ashur, wine drinking was popular and widespread in the seventh century BCE. Wine was a luxury item that remained prestigious and expensive, even after the integration of wine-producing regions along the Taurus and Zagros mountain ranges into the Assyrian empire had allowed its consumption to spread beyond royal banquets and temple ceremonies (Powell 1996: 118–21). The wine that Duri-Aššur’s agents bought was poured into animal skins (mostly made of sheep and goat skin, only exceptionally of cattle hides) and these wineskins were bound together with wooden beams in order to create rafts for the return journey to Ashur on the Tigris River. This was the best possible approach to the transport of wine; on the one hand, the river water kept the wine cool and prevented it from spoiling and, on the other, all components of this means of transport constituted valuable merchandise in Ashur and could be sold off – the merchants could sell not only the wineskins but also the logs, which were needed as building material in the forestless Ashur.

Duri-Aššur and his partners accepted investments. Although some investors contributed substantial sums of money to their trading funds, most of the amounts invested were small, sometimes just a fraction of a shekel of silver. Duri-Aššur had a loyal customer base, as most investors invested in several trading missions. The lists in Duri-Aššur’s archive collect information about

the investors and their investments and usually also give family affiliations and professional titles. This allows for a glimpse into the composition of Ashur's population in the late seventh century BCE: it was comprised mostly of craftsmen and administrative personnel in the service of the temple of Assur, but also of city officials and affiliates of the households of members of the royal family who maintained residences at Ashur. A large number of women invested in Duri-Aššur's enterprises, most of whom are identified as Egyptian. There were also a few Egyptian men among Duri-Aššur's investors. The presence of Egyptians in the lists is not at all surprising given that an Egyptian family lived right next to Duri-Aššur, one of many families that were settled into the city as highly valued specialists after the conquest of Thebes and Memphis in 671 BCE (Radner 2009: 225). But why so many women? In Egypt, women routinely conducted business independently, as contract partners equal before the law, unlike in Assyria, where women were normally represented by male relatives. The evidence from Duri-Aššur's archive would seem to indicate that, even decades after their relocation to Assyria, Egyptian women continued to enjoy this freedom in their new domicile.

Abbreviations

CTN

= *Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud*, 5 volumes, London: The British Institute for the Study of Iraq 1972–2001.

SAA

= S. Parpola (ed.), *State Archives of Assyria*, 19 volumes published, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press 1987–.

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Further Reading

Postgate 1979 remains the classic survey of the economic underpinnings of the Assyrian empire; most of what was unknown then is still unclear. Müller 2004 is an attempt to trace the development of prices and interest rates in the seventh century BCE, while duly emphasizing the problematic nature of the available source material.

There is no comprehensive analysis of Neo-Assyrian society. [Chapter 5](#) in Snell 1997 gives an overview, with helpful references in the notes to the (often conflicting) opinions of distinguished specialists such as van Driel,

Fales, Garelli, Liverani, and Postgate on the matter. Radner 1997 collects the available data from private legal documents. Machinist 1993 discusses the views of “Assyrians on Assyria” and is a good introduction to self-perceptions of Assyrian society.

Accessible surveys of “society and customs,” “the domestic scene,” “agriculture, animal husbandry and trade,” and “natural resources” can be found in Saggs 1984, [chapters 9–12](#).

Note

1 My thanks go to the building’s excavator Peter Miglus for these figures.

CHAPTER 10

Post-Imperial Assyria

Stefan R. Hauser

Introduction

The conquest of the Assyrian cultic and political capitals Ashur and Nineveh in 614/612 BCE by Medes and Babylonians sent shock waves through the entire former Assyrian realm and far beyond. It prompted a restructuring of political power, economical organization, and trade relations from the Mediterranean to Persia while intensifying the trend towards unprecedented growth and prosperity in Babylonia (see Adams 1981; Jursa 2004). The change appears particularly profound in the former core of the empire itself. While written and material sources from the Neo-Assyrian period abound, the next three centuries of Babylonian and Achaemenid rule over the region are characterized by a remarkable scarcity of sources. Because of the limited textual and archaeological evidence the period is often described as a “Dark Age” and simply referred to as “post-Assyrian.” While this is meaningful in a chronological sense, it should be noted that Assyria continued to be perceived as a distinctive geographic, administrative, and (at least retrospectively) to some extent also as a cultural entity in emic and etic perceptions. Thus the term “post-Assyrian” should be replaced by “post-imperial.”

Local written sources remain exceptionally rare until the first century AD, when Aramaic inscriptions begin to appear in Hatra and Ashur. At the same time archaeological finds show a general recovery of the region.

This chapter attempts to describe the historical/archaeological evidence for the various periods of post-imperial Assyria until the Sasanian conquest of the area between AD 226 and 241, which for various reasons provides a compelling end point for Assyrian history.

The Early Post-imperial Period

The Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods

according to written sources

It could be argued that it was the destruction of the temple of the god Assur in his like-named city (and of the tombs of earlier kings) in 614 BCE that put an end to the Assyrian empire, as it lost its legitimating core through these acts (Hauser 2012a: 108–10). After the conquest of the royal capital Nineveh in 612 BCE, Nabopolassar's army plundered Assyria up to Našibina (Nusaybin), while the king remained in the former capital (Babylonian Chronicle 3, see Grayson 1975: 94–5; Glassner 2004: 222–3). It is clear that some of the faces on the palace reliefs at Nineveh were destroyed at some point after the city had been taken, but a longer Babylonian and Median presence at Nineveh is not archaeologically confirmed. Some Assyrians continued their resistance from Ḫarran until the city fell in 610 BCE. It has long been debated whether Assyria, or at least its northern part towards the Taurus mountains, was afterwards controlled by Medes (e.g. Curtis 2003). The Babylonian chronicles suggest that in the years after the conquest of Ḫarran the Babylonian army continuously operated in northern and northwestern Syria (called Ḫatti) and in the southern districts of Urartu, which probably implies a Babylonian occupation of Assyria (Kuhrt 1995: 231); but the situation is difficult to reconstruct.

Even though Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions and official texts are neither as numerous nor as detailed as the Assyrian sources from the Neo-Assyrian period, a certain continuity of governmental and administrative structures, even within Assyria, can be conjectured (Jursa 2003: 175–6). The earliest evidence comes from the largest settlement on the Khabur, Dur-Katlimmu (modern Tell Sheikh Hamad), in the province of Laqê. In a large palatial structure there, the so-called “Red House,” archaeologists unearthed up to three floor levels post-dating the Assyrian empire. On the floor of the first of these levels, four cuneiform documents were found that were written by individuals bearing Assyrian names and using Assyrian formulas and language, even though the texts are dated to the second and fifth year of king Nebuchadnezzar (i.e. 605 and 602 BCE) (Radner 2002: 61–8). The documents are proof of the survival of some genuinely Assyrian administrative practices into the early Neo-Babylonian period.

Two Neo-Babylonian texts from Sippar (one of them probably written in 559 BCE) mention Babylonian governors in the regions formerly ruled by Assyria: at Guzana (Tell Halaf), where, in addition, letters possibly dating to the Neo-Babylonian period were found (Dalley 1993: 137), and at Ashur (Jursa 2003: 173). At other places it may have taken some time until political order was reestablished. The return of a cult statue to Arrapha (Kerkuk) by Neriglissar (Dalley 1993: 136) points to attempts to revive that city. At Arbela, the settlement and probably also the temple of Ištar are known to have thrived in the later Neo-Babylonian period. The restoration of the temple of

the moon god Šin at Harran is confirmed by a number of inscribed bricks, a cuneiform tablet, and three stelae of the last Babylonian king Nabonidus (556–539 BCE) (Yardımcı 1986; Schaudig 2001). In contrast, the cult statue of Assur remained in the Esagil temple in Babylon and was not returned to the city of Ashur before the time of Cyrus (Schaudig 2001: 3.3a col. X 32'–51').

Sources for the Achaemenid period are equally limited. A first Persian incursion into Assyrian territory occurred in 547 BCE, when the founder of the empire, Cyrus II, crossed the Tigris south of Arbela marching against Urartu.¹ Assyria was probably incorporated into the Achaemenid empire in 539 BCE (see Kuhrt 1995). In Achaemenid royal inscriptions from the royal tombs at Naqsh-e Rostam, Bisotun, and Susa, “Athuria” is consistently mentioned as one of the provinces of the empire next to, but distinct from Babylonia.² In the tomb reliefs from Darius I (521–486 BCE) to Artaxerxes III (358–338 BCE) the images of Assyrians show them among the *ethnoi* supporting the kings. They are depicted with rich hair ending in curls and full beards, clad in a knee-length belted tunic, and with laced boots and a dagger carried in the waist-belt.

Little is known about the internal organization of Assyria and its major cities during this time. Officials at Lair (Assyrian Laḫīru on the Diyala river), Arzuḫin (Arzuḫina), Arbela, Ḫalzu, and Matalubaš (Ubaše) are mentioned in an Aramaic letter sent by the governor of Egypt, whose estate manager Nakhthor travelled in the area in the late fifth century BCE (Porten and Yardeni 1986: TAD VI.9; Kuhrt 1995: 244; Curtis 2005). The rare text points to a certain level of administrative organization within ancient Assyrian cities. The information is supplemented by excavations at Tell ed-Daim on the Lower Zab, northeast of Kirkuk. On top of the tell a substantial building of 26 by 22 meters with walls accentuated by reinforcing protrusions was unearthed (al-Tekriti 1960: fig. 2). Bronze wall-plaques with floral motifs adorned some of the sixteen rooms organized around a central courtyard of what may have been the fortified palace for a local official (Curtis 2005: 189). Although missing the typical Achaemenid columns the palace fits well into the general picture of such “sites of local officialdom” throughout the Achaemenid realm (Khatchadourian 2012: 970–2).

Just a few years after Nakhthor, Xenophon provided an eye-witness account of the area in his description of the march of 10,000 Greek mercenaries (*Anabasis*). On their way from northern Babylonia to the Black Sea in 401 BCE they passed Assyria, which Xenophon considered a part of “Media.” Xenophon (Anab. 2–3) describes the area as largely uninhabited south of the Upper Zab, but with many affluent villages close to the Lower Zab and north of Nineveh, particularly in the foothills of the Taurus mountains, probably the plain of Silope. Three cities along the Tigris are mentioned by name. Kainai, “a large and prosperous city” on the western bank (Anab. 2.4.28), has been identified as Ashur, even though Xenophon’s description of the city’s

affluence at that time is not supported by archaeology. Further north Larissa is described as a huge, deserted city of 2 parasangs (11–12 km) in circumference (Anab. 3.4.7). 6 parasangs north of it Xenophon (Anab. 3.4.10) passed Mespila, a ruined city still surrounded by a wall of 6 parasangs (33–6 km) in length and 30 m in height. Despite the inexplicable names the identification with Kalḫu and Nineveh has rarely been doubted, although later Greek and Roman geographers and historians were well aware of the location of Nineveh (“Ninos”) and its role as ancient capital of Assyria, and even mention the region around Kalḫu (Nimrud) as “Kalakēne” (Strabo 16.1.1; Ptolemy 6.1.3; Tacitus, Annals 12.13).

The former capital cities are not mentioned by any of the Alexander historians, not even in connection with the decisive battle between Darius III and Alexander at Gaugamela (Tell Gomel?; Reade 2001: 187) in 331 BCE. They claimed instead that it was Arbela that had served as Darius III’s base before the battle and that Alexander followed him there in pursuit (Curtius Rufus 4.9.35; 4.15.61; Arrian, Alexander 3.15).

The post-imperial void

The very limited textual evidence from the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods is not counterbalanced by archaeological finds. While the final siege and destruction of Nineveh (Stronach 1997: 315–18) and Ashur (Miglus 2000: 87–9; Hauser 2012a: 106–8) have left impressive material traces, the post-imperial developments are difficult to ascertain. There is no indication that the former Assyrian palaces were reused as governmental seats by their successors, although this would appear logical and confirm the evidence from Dur-Katlimmu. But some evidence of continued occupation or re-settlement, often termed “squatter occupation,” does exist, even though it is of uncertain date. On the citadel of Kalḫu (Nimrud) mud floors and some repair work were recognized as evidence for a minor re-occupation in the Northwest Palace, the Burnt Palace, the Nabû Temple, and the houses in TW53. A workshop with kilns for the production of glass in the ruins of the Burnt Palace and partition walls in the Southeast Palace throne room were assigned an Achaemenid date (summarized by Curtis 2003: 158–60; cf. Barag 1985: 108–9). Several walls and floors 1.5 to 2.5 m above the Neo-Assyrian floor indicate the re-use of parts of Shalmaneser III’s *ekal māšarti* (Curtis 2003: 158).

Only few remnants of either Neo-Babylonian or Achaemenid date are known from Nineveh (Dalley 1993: 137–43, more skeptical Curtis 2003: 160). Examples for post-612 BCE repairs, floors, and blocked doorways were also noted in Dur-Šarrukin (Khorsabad) in the Sîn and Nabû Temples, Residences F, K, and Z, and even in the Palace of Sargon (Curtis 2003: 161). Again their date is questionable, also because possibly related Achaemenid-style bracelets

might have been found with even later Alexander coins (Reade 2001: 187; Curtis 2005: 186).

Still elusive archaeological evidence for the post-imperial period is found at Ashur. Private buildings of uncertain dates were discovered at various places beneath Arsacid period levels (Andrae 1977: 237; Hauser 1994). So-called “Stülper” burials most probably belong to the Late Achaemenid or Early Seleucid period (Hauser 2011: 126). The most important “post-imperial” building is the so-called “Temple A,” which served as a repository for earlier Assyrian building inscriptions (Miglus 1992). This temple within the Assur temple precinct shows the Babylonian design of consecutive transverse rooms for anteroom and cella. It is difficult to date and might be as late as the Seleucid period (Hauser 2011: 122–5). But it could also coincide with a revival of the city at the time when the statue of the god Assur was returned from Babylon by Cyrus.³ All in all, despite the evidence for limited occupation or re-settlement, we have to assume a nearly complete abandonment of the Assyrian capital cities, which previously covered 700, 360, and 75 ha respectively, and must have had hundreds of thousands of inhabitants.

The restricted material evidence also applies to other Assyrian centers (see [Figure 10.1](#)). At Arbela, which features continuously in the textual record, post-imperial levels predating the Seleucid period have not yet been recognized in excavations (Nováček et al. 2008: 276–81). The only site with a clear continuity of settlement and administration, documented by dated texts, is Dur-Katlimmu, where the Assyrian buildings were still in use with raised floor levels. But this situation might not have lasted for more than a few years, as the last phase of these dwellings is now dated to the turn of the sixth to the fifth century BCE, based on the form of characters found on ostraca from the uppermost floor (Röllig 2003).

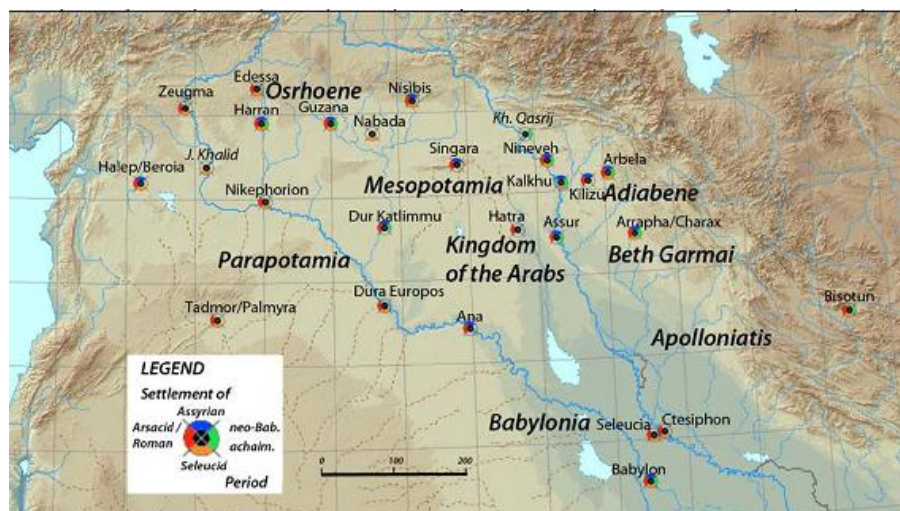


Figure 10.1 Sites of the Late Assyrian to Arsacid periods mentioned in the text. Map by S. R. Hauser based on a topographical map by M. Grosch, SFB 586.

Source: Reproduced with permission of S. R. Hauser.

The assumption that there was a significant breakdown of civilization in the region seems to be supported by numerous archaeological surveys carried out between the 1970s and 2000s in Northern Iraq, Syria, and southeast Anatolia. They consistently show that there was a dramatic increase in the number of sites and the overall settlement area of them towards the later Neo-Assyrian period (Jasim 1988; Bernbeck 1993; Wilkinson and Tucker 1995; Ball 1996; Lyonnet 1996; Barbanes 1999; Morandi Bonacossi 2000; Wilkinson et al. 2005; Anastasio 2007; Altaweel 2008), occasionally in connection with an extension of new or existing canal systems (e.g. Ur 2005; Morandi Bonacossi 1999), and a push of the settled areas beyond their former limits far into the steppe (Bernbeck 1993; Wilkinson 1995). But throughout the area only very few sites have been assigned to the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods. The preliminary reports on the recently unfolding archaeological activities in Iraqi Kurdistan closely mirror this picture (e.g. Ur et al. 2013). The situation is in sharp contrast to the remarkably rich and varied architectural and textual evidence from many traditional Babylonian cities, e.g. Babylon, Sippar, Kiš, Uruk, and Ur, which prospered in the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods (Baker 2012 with references).

Explaining the evidence

It is commonly assumed that the drop in the number and size of settlements in the countryside reflects a massive change in population comparable to the abandonment of the capital cities. But these phenomena need further discussion and explanation. First of all, we should question the material data. A major obstacle is the difficulty of identifying the pottery of the post-imperial period. It is clear that no Neo-Babylonian ceramics were introduced from the south. Seals in Babylonian or Achaemenid style, which have been attested at many places throughout the region (e.g. Bregstein 1996; Garrison 2000; Kaptan 2002; Fuensanta and Crivelli 2010) and could have been used for dating purposes, are likewise rare in Assyria (Curtis 2005).

In recent years evidence is mounting that a number of pottery forms on which the dating of survey sites relies are not restricted to the imperial period, but persisted into later times. This continuity of pottery forms was first observed by D. Oates (see Oates and Oates 2001: 256–8) and confirmed by Curtis (1989), who in an important excavation in the Eski Mosul Dam area at Khirbet Qasrij identified a work area around a pottery kiln. The pottery resembled Neo-Assyrian examples, but lacked vegetable temper and featured

some new forms. It was thus dated to the sixth century by the excavator (Curtis 1989: 19–54) and became the standard reference material for surveys in the region. But more recently the idea that there was a change in wares has been challenged (Green 1999; Morandi Bonacossi 1999; and esp. Kreppner 2006). Kreppner (2008: 156) now maintains, based on the huge corpus of pottery from Sheikh Hamad that can be dated with the help of texts, that in Assyria proper “a differentiation of pottery to Iron Age II and Iron Age III or Neo-Assyrian and ‘Post-Assyrian’ [...] is not a meaningful distinction.” Excavations in the wider hinterland of Carchemish and Til-Barsip in the middle Euphrates region offer a chance to identify post-imperial material, seals, and pottery (Deve Hüyük: Moorey 1980; Til-Barsip: Jamieson 1999; Tell Shiukh Fawqani: Luciani 2005, Makinson 2005; on Tilbes Höyük and Hacinebi see Fuensanta and Crivelli 2010). The pottery chronology for these periods in Assyria itself, however, remains still poorly defined, which affects the identification of post-imperial period sites in surveys and the resulting historical reconstructions.

If we agree that post-imperial pottery is nearly indistinguishable from late Neo-Assyrian pottery, the traditional reconstruction of late seventh to fifth century BCE settlement distribution and history, which largely depends on archaeological surveys, may well need to be revised. Based on the idea that at least some identifiable eighth to seventh century BCE pottery forms were also produced in post-imperial times, Morandi Bonacossi (2008) assumed that 36 percent of the surveyed Neo-Assyrian sites on the Lower Khabur possibly or probably survived the fall of the empire and persisted in the post-imperial period. This concerns mostly (relatively) large sites, which endured due to their economic and political potential, and fortified places or fortresses. Accordingly the region would have become poorer and less densely settled than before, but neither poor nor entirely uninhabited (Morandi Bonacossi 2008: 196–8; cf. Gavagnin 2012 for the Tell Leilan region). There would still have been a strong decline, but no complete devastation and abandonment, although the disappearance of smaller villages indicates a genuine change.

In the late imperial period the expansion of many settlements, often accompanied by new irrigation projects, must have been the result of central planning, aimed at maximizing annual yields by agricultural intensification to support the hypertrophic cities. This system was prone to overexploitation of resources in its often marginal areas or to failure, especially in arid years. The system’s resilience must have been put to test already before the Assyrian empire’s defeat, and its dissolution was most likely the result of the twenty years of unrest and war in the late seventh century BCE. That only larger sites and fortresses along the river survived, while the sites in the steppe and countryside were given up (e.g. Bernbeck 1993; Wilkinson and Tucker 1995: 67), indicates profound changes in the agricultural organization that must have resulted from the political developments. We should expect that the

landowning Assyrian grandees related to the court lost their landholdings. Even more important for the collapse of the agricultural organization in the countryside was the abandonment of the capital cities, which led to the decline of the market for agricultural products. With the loss of many of its former consumers (demand), the whole supply system, including facilities like canals, became obsolete.

The question remains why and whereto the former inhabitants vanished. Parts of the population might have died through warfare or its indirect consequences, such as malnutrition and diseases. Other people were probably deported to Babylonia as indicated by a text that reports on groups from the provinces of Našibina and Rašappa that were brought to the Babylonian king at Nineveh (Babylonian Chronicle 3, 47–9). Former deportees, forced laborers, and immigrants from other regions of the empire might have wished to leave Assyria. Some might have moved to Babylonia, where we observe a long-lasting steady growth of settlements and a tremendous intensification of irrigation agriculture during the Neo-Babylonian, Achaemenid, and also later periods up to Late Sasanian times (e.g. Adams 1981). The growth of settlements and prosperity in Babylonia might have been caused to some extent by population movement towards the south.

In Assyria the loss of markets, changes in land rights, weakened control and missing central maintenance of infrastructure together with enhanced instability must have driven farmers from their fields. The disintegration of the economic system might have encouraged parts of the population to seek their livelihood in a (re)turn to nomadism, which in turn could have forced others in unprotected areas to leave their land as well. Sites probably needed a certain size to be self-sufficient and survive. In connection with the existence of fortresses (identified by Morandi Bonacossi 2008), which are needed in periods of disturbances and insecurity, we might interpret this tableau as representing a fragile situation in which the new rulers showed limited interest in settlement growth and economic development.

We cannot yet fully explain all the changes that occurred, but there is no question that they were part of the fundamental, all-encompassing reversal of social and economic structures in Assyria from imperial to post-imperial times. Despite the continuing existence of some settlements and some short-term administrative continuity (e.g. at Dur-Katlimmu), we can say that what happened was a collapse (see Renfrew 1984: 367–9 on criteria; Middleton 2012 on causes of the phenomenon). This collapse is visible in the (probably forced) large-scale abandonment of capital cities, palaces, and other public buildings, the loss of cuneiform literacy, the disappearance of a centralized economy, the dissolution of the large-scale management of the Assyrian countryside, and the strong decline in population. Throughout the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods, the satrapy of “the land of Ashur,” the return of the statue of Assur notwithstanding, remained a sparsely populated,

marginal region.

Restructuring and Revitalization: The Seleucid and Arsacid Periods

A brief political and geographical survey

After the dissolution of the Achaemenid empire and the death of its conqueror Alexander, Assyria became part of the Seleucid empire. Although we possess royal letters and treaties recorded by contemporary historians and later Roman authors, and despite its geographically central position within the early Seleucid realm, which for a brief period in the early third century BCE stretched from the “Upper Satrapies” in modern Afghanistan and Iran to Asia Minor, we hear little about Assyria in the extant textual sources. The economic and political centers of the Seleucid empire were Babylonia with its large traditional cities and the new eastern capital Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, and Syria with the new western capital Antioch. While most eastern satrapies of the empire were largely identical with those of the Achaemenid period, we encounter a number of smaller new political entities north of Assyria such as Gordyene, Sophene, and Mygdonia, which later became part of Armenia. Diodorus Siculus, describing consecutive distributions of satrapies among Alexander’s former generals, mentions the satrapy of Mesopotamia for 323 BCE (Diod. 18.3.3) and Mesopotamia and Arbelitis for 320 BCE (Diod. 18.39.6). This indicates a new division of the territory along the Tigris.

As a consequence of the internal conflicts between various Seleucid pretenders to the throne, the satrapies east of Syria were conquered by the Arsacid (Parthian) ruler Mithridates I. between 148 and 141 BCE and soon formed the new economic and political heart of the Arsacid empire. The process and the date of the appropriation of the formerly Assyrian territories by the Arsacids is still uncertain. They had certainly conquered the entire area up the northwestern section of the Euphrates when in 96 BCE the Parthian envoy, Orobazes, met the Roman *propraetor* of Cilicia, Sulla, on the Euphrates to declare the river the border of their respective spheres of interest. The Seleucids continued to officially govern Syria until Pompey converted their state into a Roman province in 64 BCE. Assyria, in the form of two administrative units, the Kingdom of the Arabs based at Hatra and the Kingdom of Adiabene based at Arbela, remained an integral part of the Arsacid Empire until its takeover by the Sasanian ruler Ardashir between AD 226 and 241.

In accordance with the ancient Seleucid administrative terminology, Roman

authors used the term “Assyria” (or “Aturia”) mostly for areas east of the Tigris. According to Pliny (NH 5.13) Assyria was the older name of Adiabene, the Greek/Latin name (derived from Aramaic Hdyab; Syriac Hḏayyāb) for one of the dependent kingdoms within the Arsacid and Sasanian empires. The kingdom of Adiabene was based at Arbela and centered between the Upper and Lower Zab, but certainly included other territories east of the Tigris as well (see [Figure 10.1](#)). Accordingly both names were employed by Roman authors with varying geographical latitude (Strabo 16.1.1–3 and 19; Pliny, NH 6.16.41). In Ptolemy’s Geography (6.1) Adiabene is considered only the central region of Assyria. Assyria’s limits are marked by the Tigris in the west, beyond which (in Seleucid tradition) we find “Mesopotamia” up to the Euphrates, and the mountains of Media in the east. In the north Assyria borders on Armenia, and its southernmost district Sittakene (listed as a separate region by Pliny, NH 6.29) extends to the Susiana. Among the districts of Assyria Ptolemy mentions Kalakene, Arbelitis and the land of the Garamaioi (Beth Garmaï in later Christian literature), i.e. the area around Kerkuk (Charax or Karka d-Beth Slokh, the Assyrian Arraphā; see [Figure 10.1](#)).

While the king of Adiabene resided in Arbela, local officials are attested in the first century at Nineveh and Ashur (Reade 2001: 190; Hauser 2011). Their relation to the rulers at Arbela, who converted to Judaism in the first century AD (Neusner 1964), is not known. West of the Tigris a number of building inscriptions document the existence of another *mrj* (“lord”) at Hatra from the mid-first century AD onwards. After the Arsacids lost the Kingdom of Osrhoene to the Romans in 165/166, Hatra’s ruler became the “King of the Arabs” (Hauser 1998). His territory stretched from the Tigris to the Khabor and from the Euphrates in the south in all likelihood to the foothills of Jebel Sinjar. As in the Seleucid period Assyria was thus split into two kingdoms situated east and west of the river Tigris. In later times, the term “Assyria” was often used for most of modern Iraq (Amm. Marc. 16.6; 23.6), probably reflecting the situation of the early Sasanian period with the three main provinces of Asorestan (south), Adiabene (east of the Tigris, in some cases called “Athuria”), and Arbayestan (in the northwest; see Morony 1982: 3. 6–17).

Seleucid resettlement

The transition from Achaemenid to Seleucid rule had little immediate impact on Assyria. The area remained in the shadow of Babylonia, where we observe intense population growth connected with huge irrigation systems. A new canal, the Nahr Malkha, was dug from the Euphrates to the Tigris. At its mouth the new capital Seleucia-on-the-Tigris was built. Its foundation was

part of early Seleucid attempts to restructure their empire with the help of new administrative structures, increased monetization of the economy, and an ambitious program of urbanization, especially in Syria (Cohen 2006).

The creation of new cities did not cause the traditional Babylonian cities to decline right away. On the contrary, especially Babylon, which featured a sizeable Greek/Macedonian community, remained a metropolis until the later Arsacid period (Hauser 2000a; van der Spek 2009). The cult of Marduk remained important, and his priests continued their daily astronomical observations (Sachs and Hunger 1988; 1989; 1996), to some extent supported by the Seleucid rulers. On the other hand, the foundation of new cities and military settlements in Syria and Babylonia provided opportunities for many soldiers and other immigrants from the west. With them Greek deities, often depicted on official coins and seals (Bollati/Messina 2004), and a number of other Hellenic cultural features found their way into Babylonia.

In the early third century, all along the Euphrates new cities emerged, from Zeugma in the north to Neapolis at the head of the Royal Canal in Babylonia. Placed at irregular intervals, all of them were designed to control the river traffic, major Euphrates crossings, and other economically and strategically important geographical points, like the entries of the Balih (controlled by Nikephorion, later Raqqa) and the Khabur, and to monitor nomadic movements. The best known of these fortress cities, and the one closest to Assyria, was Europos Dura, in the Seleucid province of Parapotamia, which overlooked the steppe southeast of the Khabur (Hopkins 1979; Brody and Hoffman 2011). A comparable site is Jebel Khalid, situated on the west bank of the Euphrates in northern Syria. In both cases a strongly fortified city with large representative buildings on higher plateaus displays strong Western influence on public buildings, including a peristyle court and a Doric temple (Clarke et al. 2002). In the case of Europos Dura the usual grid plan and fortifications probably belong to an enlargement of the mid-second century BCE that occurred in connection with the Arsacid conquest of Babylonia (Kosmin 2011). At about this time a small palace was also erected to the north of Assyria at Tell Beydar (Galan and Olivares-Pantoja 2007). It was probably abandoned early in the first century BCE, like Jebel Khalid, while Europos Dura remained an important administrative stronghold first with the Arsacids and after ca. AD 165 as a Roman military site.

In Assyria proper we have little evidence for Seleucid royal policy. Several levels of Seleucid period occupation, which ends at the time of the presumed Arsacid conquest of the region in ca. 141 BCE, were already excavated in the 1950s in Nimrud (Oates and Oates 1958; Jenkins 1958). Numerous Seleucid coins and pottery demonstrate the beginning resettlement of the lower city of Ashur (Hauser 2011). An impressive array of characteristic pottery types, including fishplates and bowls with incurved rims, well-known from western Syria and the Mediterranean, also allows the identification of Seleucid period

sites in surveys. Contrary to the preceding period we find clear evidence for widespread, although not dense resettlement in form of dispersed villages in nearly all surveys, especially in the north and east of the Tigris. Although Greek cultural influence is less obvious than in Babylonia, handles of amphorae, e.g. at Nimrud and Ashur, indicate close contact and economic exchange with more western areas of the empire. Greek settlers might have come to Nineveh, where we find sculptures of Hermes and Heracles (who was identified with Nergal) and inscriptions with Greek names, although the latter date to the Arsacid period (Reade 1998; 2001).

Prosperity and reorganization: the Arsacid period

The slow recovery of Assyria in Seleucid times continued in the early Arsacid period. It eventually resulted in a most remarkable return of prosperity during the last 200 years of Arsacid rule. Across Assyria, on both sides of the Tigris, surveys prove an enormous density of settlement, only comparable to the Neo-Assyrian period. This holds true for the region north of Nineveh towards the Taurus (Wilkinson and Tucker 1995; Ball 1996) and throughout the Khabur triangle (Dorna Metzger 1996). Intensified settlement took place along the lower Khabur (Kühne 2005) and especially all over the plains south of Jebel Sinjar and Tell Afar as well as along the Wadi Tharthar (Ibrahim 1986; Hauser 2000b). Even in the steppe between the Wadi Tharthar, the Khabur, and the Euphrates, in an area that receives less than 200 mm annual precipitation, we find an unprecedented number of (semi-permanent?) settlements. Along the Euphrates previously existing villages and cities expanded. A major point of reference for the material culture, although outside of Assyria proper, is Europos Dura. Excavations there unearthed richly decorated temples for diverse deities, a Jewish synagogue, and a Christian chapel dating to the early third century AD, indicating the religious complexity of this frontier region between the Roman and Arsacid empires (Brody and Hoffman 2011).

The development of the regions in the steppe and south of Jebel Sinjar was enabled by political stability and probably helped by favorable climatic conditions. The entire settlement system of several tiers finds its center in Hatra, situated 3 km west of the middle course of the Wadi Tharthar, 50 km west of Ashur and 90 km southwest of Nineveh, i.e. in the steppe south of the modern margins of arable land. Because of a high groundwater table and its closeness to the Wadi, this place had served as a meeting point for pastoralists for a long time and probably generated some settlement (Ibrahim 1986: 92–4; Venco Ricciardi and Peruzzetto 2013). Inscriptions by its *mry'* attest to major building activities in the central *temenos* of the city since the later first century AD (Hauser 1998; Kaizer 2013). The main god worshipped was the sun-god,

Šamaš – on coins the city called itself *ḫṭr’ dšmš*, “the enclosure of the sun (god).” In the second century AD the city encompassed 310 ha. Hatra, with its huge central *temenos* and many minor cultic buildings (Safar and Mustafa 1976; Jakubiak 2013), developed into a religious center for political and economic exchange between nomads and sedentary people, especially after its ruler was awarded the rank of “King of the Arabs” by the Arsacid King of Kings (Hauser 1998). At this time the main route between Ctesiphon and the eastern Roman empire no longer passed Adiabene, but Hatra (Altaweel and Hauser 2004). Because of its strategic importance, Trajan (in AD 117) and Septimus Severus (in AD 197 and 199) made attempts to conquer the city. The high numbers of settlements in its hinterland, and some of the more than 500 Aramaic inscriptions from Hatra, indicate a substantial process of sedentarization and point to the successful integration of nomadic and sedentary people into the Arsacid empire, with Hatra as arbitrator between state and tribes (Hauser 1998).

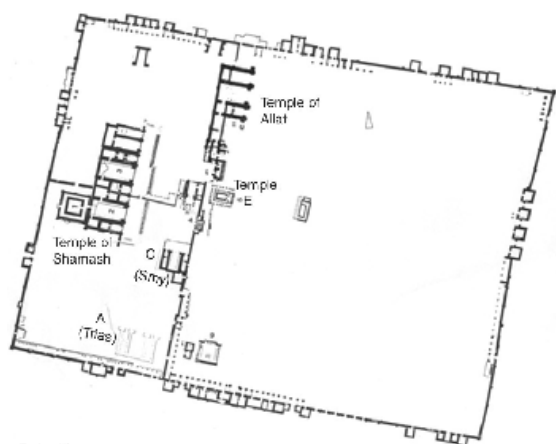
The situation at Hatra is in line with the fact that the Arsacid period in general shows an extraordinary density of settlement, partly encouraged by enormous irrigation projects and a generally high level of international exchange and prosperity throughout the empire (Hauser 2012b). Literary sources, like Cassius Dio’s (78.1.2) report on the devastation of the local Adiabenean dynasty’s tombs by Caracalla in AD 216, lead us to expect the same for the Kingdom of Adiabene and its capital. And indeed, preliminary reports on recent surveys indicate that the high density of Arsacid period settlement west of the Tigris is mirrored all across modern Iraqi Kurdistan (e.g. Ur et al. 2013).

In addition, Arbela became one of the first centers of Christianity. According to the Chronicle of Arbela, a bishopric was already established around AD 100, but the Chronicle’s reliability is disputed (Kawerau 1985; Jullien and Jullien 2002: 133–6). It is certain, however, that Arbela and Karkha d-Beth Slōk, administrative center of Beth Garmaï, served as important bishoprics throughout the Sasanian and later Islamic periods (see Fiey 1965/1969).

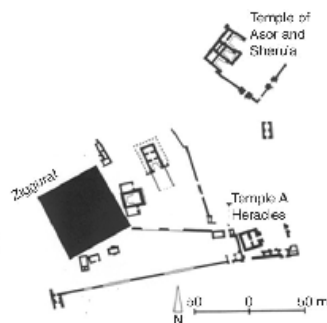
Unfortunately, very little is known archaeologically about these cities and their wider territory. In the 1920/30s excavations within the confines of Adiabene unearthed Seleucid and Arsacid period domestic architecture and burials in glazed sarcophagi at Kilizu (Kakzu; new excavations since 2011) and Yorgan Tepe (Nuzi) (Anastasio 2008; Potts 1996). More important is the evidence from Nineveh, which clearly experienced a phase of extensive settlement. The Assyrian Nabû temple was re-used as a temple for Nabû-Apollo. The throne room of the South-West palace was transformed into a temple, possibly for Heracles-Nergal, a god who was revered also at Ashur, Hatra, and Europos Dura (Invernizzi 1989; Kaizer 2000). The discovery of a temple for Hermes and an altar north of Nebi Yunus indicate that the settlement was not confined to the Assyrian palace and temple area, but that

Kuyunjik served as an *akropolis* for Ninos, which at least at one point in the first century AD was governed by a *strategos* and *epistates* with the Greek name Apollonios (Reade 1998; Merkelbach and Stauber 2005: 98).

Epistates might be the equivalent to the title *mry'*, which was used between the first and the third century AD in Hatra and in Ashur. During this time the eponymous city of Assyria thrived for the last time. Public and private buildings, usually built around an *iwan* facing north, cover two-thirds of the area of the former Neo-Assyrian city. The so-called “Parthian Palace,” a large complex around a court framed by four *iwans*, a new architectural feature probably first introduced in this area, is considered the seat of the local administrators. But the most spectacular feature at Arsacid Ashur was the temple complex on the cliff overlooking the Tigris River. A number of temples, including one for Heracles-Nergal and one in western Greek peripteral style, was surrounded by a temenos wall that enclosed an area of 4 ha. Exactly on top of the traditional, three-thousand years old temple of Assur, a tripartite temple complex of iwans was discovered (Figure 10.2). The temple agrees in size and layout with the Great *Iwans* at Hatra and must have been impressive at its time (Andrae and Lenzen 1933). In the late second and early third century, Aramaic graffiti and votive inscriptions were scratched into the floor. They prove that the gods venerated in the temple were Aššur (now rendered “Asor”) and his wife Seru’a. Furthermore, the dates of the inscriptions agree with the two main religious festivals of the traditional Assyrian calendar, the *Akītu* (New Year) festival in the month of Nisan and the *parak šīmāte*, a festival held between the 20th and 26th Šebat. The temple and its inscriptions, as well as the rebuilding of Sennacherib’s *Akītu*-temple outside the city walls and the frequent use of traditional theophoric elements in personal names, clearly indicate that more than 800 years after the violent destruction of Ashur at the end of the Neo-Assyrian empire, the most important Assyrian gods were still worshipped (Hauser 2011).



Hatra, Temenos
in the 2nd/early 3rd century



Assur, Temenos
in the 2nd/early 3rd century

Figure 10.2 The sacred precincts of Ashur and Hatra in the first centuries AD.

Source: Reproduced with permission of S. R. Hauser.

In several respects the later Arsacid period thus resembles the Neo-Assyrian. For the first time since the depopulation of Assyria around 600 BCE the entire region is intensively populated again. The high settlement density and overall prosperity continue to some extent during the Sasanian period (Simpson 1996), although we observe a shift in settlement towards the west of the Tigris (Hauser 2000b). On the other hand, the entire society and its culture were completely transformed. This concerns not only the change in languages and material culture or the introduction of new, western artistic traditions, but also the social and political situation, especially with regard to the political integration of nomadic and sedentary populations within the “Kingdom of the Arabs” and the role of the “King of Kings” at Ctesiphon. Other important changes, inspired by Greek, tribal, and monotheistic religious concepts, affected the local cults. They were soon to replace the ancient deities, including Assur, who had just made a remarkable comeback.

The final sack of Ashur

In AD 220 Ardashir, descendant of Sasan, rebelled against the Arsacid ruling family, and in AD 226 he seized the capital Ctesiphon. Armenia and Hatra were the last stands of the Arsacids. Hatra’s king and his allies warded off the first attacks on Hatra, in AD 228/9. But in AD 240/241, after a two-year long siege, Hatra was finally conquered by the Sasanians (Hauser 2013), leaving behind the largest known siege-works of Near Eastern history (Hauser and Tucker 2009). The Sasanian campaigns not only destroyed Hatra, but depopulated its hinterland and moved the sedentary population to new settlements further north, towards the frontier with the Roman empire, while Hira became the new center for the administration of nomadic populations. Already during their first attack on Hatra in AD 228/9 the Sasanians subjugated the city of Ashur and annihilated the temple of its main god, which was never rebuilt again. From the foundation of their religious capital and throughout the various stages of their history, the Assyrians had always been ultimately focused on their god, and so this final destruction of his temple at the end of the Arsacid period, 842 years after the Median conquest of the city, was the definitive end of the might that Ashur had been for so long.⁴

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Further Reading

There are very few sources for the earlier post-imperial period in Assyria. The

available evidence was collected in Kuhrt 1995 and Curtis 2005. For the Neo-Babylonian period see, in general, Jursa 2004 and Baker 2012. As a synthesis on the Achaemenid empire Briant 2002 is unsurpassed. Curtis and Tallis 2005 document Achaemenid material culture. Although challenged by Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993, historians still tend to look at the Seleucid empire with a notable Western bias, but note the important new book by Kosmin 2014. There is no specific review of the Seleucid period in the region. The traditionally rather negative assessment of the Arsacid empire has been challenged in recent years, see Hauser 2012b (with references). The history of Hatra is summarized by Hauser 1998; for newer research see Dirven 2013. Summaries of recent fieldwork by more than thirty international teams in Iraqi Kurdistan were presented at the conference “Archaeological Research in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the Adjacent Areas,” Athens, November 2013, see Kopanias and MacGinnis 2016

Notes

- 1 This crossing has always been connected with Cyrus’s famous conquest of Lydia. A new collation shows that the name of the country he is aiming at starts with “U,” not “Lu,” and probably points to battles with Urartu (Heller 2010: 199–206).
- 2 See the comparative charts in Klinkott 2005: 71–3. Herodotus (7.64) reports that the Assyrians were called Syrians by the Greeks, while he himself uses the name Assyria for Assyrians and Babylonians together. The Babylonian version of the Susa charter likewise replaces “Assyrians” with “people from ‘*ebir nāri*,’” the area beyond the river Euphrates, i.e. Syria and even Phoenicia. Assyria is mentioned among the provinces that revolted against Darius I in 521 BCE (DB §21), but played apparently no major role in these events, although one of the defeated Median insurgents was later impaled at Arbela (DB §33).
- 3 Burials within the royal palace at Ashur have been repeatedly considered evidence for a post-Assyrian re-use of the ruined building (e.g. Pedde 2008: 51). Recently it has been argued that these burials represent members of the royal household like those entombed beneath the Northwest Palace at Kalḥu/Nimrud (Hauser 2012a: 335–45).
- 4 This did not hinder the population of the region to keep the memory alive and positively connect with the Assyrian empire in local histories of the Sasanian period, see e.g. Payne 2012.

PART II

The Fringes of Empire: Assyria and its Neighbors

CHAPTER 11

Assyria and the North: Anatolia

Andreas Fuchs

The mountain ranges of the Taurus and the northern Zagros functioned as a barrier, permeable to trade, ideas, and sporadic military forays, but a major obstacle to any long-term efforts to establish permanent political control in the regions beyond. In fact, the mountain chains running west to east created two separate political theaters, whose actors were most of the time occupied with problems on their own side. As long as Assyria existed, the only ancient Near Eastern power that managed to establish itself firmly north and south of the Taurus was the Hittite empire, which was in control both of central Anatolia and Syria from the late 14th to the early 12th century. None of the states centered in Mesopotamia was able to exercise an equally lasting influence over the people of Anatolia.

The Eastern Taurus Mountains

For most parts of Assyria's history even the mountain areas closest to the Ashur–Nineveh–Arba'il triangle were under indirect control at best. For many a young Assyrian king for the first time in sole command of his army, campaigning against the tiresome but harmless nearby hillbillies was a welcome opportunity to gain military experience without taking risk.

In the late 13th century, Tukulti-Ninurta I tried to bring the entire mountain fringes of northern Mesopotamia under Assyrian control, but whatever he achieved was lost again in the early 12th century, when the area was troubled and in part overrun by invading people like the Mušku and the Paphu (Fuchs 2000: 89f.). By contrast, in the crisis years of the 11th century the northern mountains seem to have been quiet enough to become a refuge for Assyrians, who tried to escape Aramaean raids ravaging the lowlands.

For most of their history, the Assyrians were content to control their mountainous neighborhood indirectly, if at all. Only very late, in the second half of the eighth century, as a countermove to the Urartian expansion from the north, did Tiglath-pileser III establish Assyrian fortresses and administrative centers in these areas. This permanent presence of the two great powers left the existing local chiefdoms and kingdoms in a precarious situation. More than ever they had to resort to dangerous political maneuvers

to survive.

In the east, Assyrians and Urartians fought for the control of Mušašir (near modern Muğesir?), a most important cult center of the god Țaldi, which was pillaged by Sargon II in 714. North of modern Zakho, Ukku and Kumme were age-old rivals. The Assyrians favored the cult center of Kumme, the venerated seat of the storm god Teššub, so Ukku looked for help in Urartu. Further west, the Hurrian kings of Šubria tried to preserve their independence by remaining strictly neutral, which also meant that they refused to extradite refugees to either side. In the long run, however, such a safe haven for criminals and for victims of persecution was intolerable to both superpowers. When Esarhaddon conquered the kingdom in 673, the Urartians grudgingly accepted the fait accompli (Radner 2012).

Eastern Anatolia and Urartu

For most of Assyrian history, politically as well as economically, eastern Anatolia – defined here as the lands between the Euphrates and the eastern border of modern Turkey – was beyond Assyria’s political horizon. Those strange lands behind the Taurus could occasionally be reached by military expeditions, and in 1112 BCE Tiglath-pileser I passed through the whole range, from east to west, up to the city of Milidia (near modern Malatya), but his expedition, albeit spectacular, was an isolated event of no lasting consequence. Within the “lands of Nairi,” as eastern Anatolia is called in his inscriptions, the king boasts to have defeated no fewer than twenty-three kingdoms, with the kingdom of Dayeni (near the source of the Euphrates) the most important among them.

More than two hundred years later, in the ninth century, Assyria’s attention was focused on the region once more, when a new expansionist power, which already dominated the Nairi-lands, was about to encroach on Assyria’s sphere of influence. The rulers of this kingdom, which probably had emerged in the 10th century, called themselves in their own language “kings of Biainili” and “kings of Nairi” if they used the Akkadian, i.e. Assyrian language. The Assyrians identified their new rival as the kingdom of Urartu, and due to the predominance of Assyrian sources, modern historians and archaeologists are using the term Urartu rather than Biainili.

The landscape of Urartu was dominated by huge intersecting mountain chains with a number of rather small, island-like areas suitable for agriculture in between. Due to long and cold winters, the lines of communication between these islands were periodically interrupted by snow and ice (Zimansky 1985). In terms of military strength and economic power, the Urartian kingdom was clearly inferior to Assyria, but the combination of inaccessibility and a harsh

climate, which shortened the campaign seasons of the Assyrians and always forced them to retreat before the onset of winter, was a crucial strategic advantage that time and again guaranteed Urartu's survival, even in the wake of the most disastrous defeats.

The first round of conflicts started soon after 866 BCE, when the Urartian king Arramu (attested between 859 and 844) encroached upon both Šubria and the fertile plains west and south of Lake Urmia, where his advance threatened Gilzanu, Assyria's most valuable vassal in the east. In 856, Shalmaneser III devastated the Urartian core areas around Lake Van, but Arramu survived. In the years afterwards, he kept a low profile, probably enhancing Urartu's strong natural defenses by building fortresses. As a result, the Urartians withstood the next Assyrian incursions, which followed in 844 and 830, and even started a new round of open war. After years of inconclusive maneuvering, the succession crisis in Assyria between the sons of Shalmaneser III (826–820) enabled Sarduri I (attested in 830) and Išpueni (attested in 820), Arramu's immediate successors, to conquer the contested lands west and south of Lake Urmia at last. Sarduri I was the first Urartian king who left inscriptions of his own, in the Akkadian language. For those of his son Išpueni, the Urartian language was used instead. The inscriptions of Išpueni are, moreover, the first to mention Ḫaldi, the supreme god of the Urartian pantheon.

The period between 820 and 745 BCE was Urartu's age of conquest. No longer hampered by Assyria, which was much less ambitious in this period than it had been in the days of Shalmaneser III, Minua (not attested in Assyrian sources), Arğišti I (attested 778–764), and Sarduri II (attested 754–735) were expanding their kingdom continuously. In the west, the valley of the Murat-Su and the surrounding areas up to the Euphrates river were conquered, and some campaigns even reached into central Anatolia and northern Syria. In the northwest, the old kingdom of Dayeni, last mentioned in 844 as an ally of Assyria, probably fell prey to the Urartian onslaught. In the north, the kings subdued large parts of the Araxes valley and established Urartian power at the shore of Lake Sevan. In the east, their expansion efforts led to more mixed results, due to the fierce resistance offered by the Mannean kingdoms, but occasional forays nevertheless penetrated deeply into western Iran, right into regions of vital importance for Assyria. Southwards, the Urartians were probing into the valleys of the Taurus.

The Urartian kings tried to avoid another war against the southern superpower, but even so their moves in Syria, in the Taurus, and in western Iran were seen by their Assyrian counterparts as most insolent challenges. Plagued as they were by domestic troubles, however, there was not much the Assyrian rulers could do to stop the Urartian progress effectively. A lengthy war in the 770s remained inconclusive, whereas Aššur-nirari V apparently even suffered some sort of defeat, the nature of which remains, however,

unclear.

In this period the Urartian kings left detailed records of their military deeds and they realized ambitious building projects, which besides the usual fortress building included sophisticated irrigation systems, temples, and huge fortified palaces like those of Erebuni and Argištihinili.

However, Urartu's success depended on Assyria's weakness, which came to a sudden end when Tiglath-pileser III ascended the Assyrian throne. In 743, Sarduri II suffered a disaster west of the Euphrates, in the battle of Kištan and Halpi, which forced him to abandon all hope of establishing Urartian overlordship in Syria. In 739 and 736, Tiglath-pileser counterattacked in the Taurus and strengthened the Assyrian positions all along his northern frontier. The war fought between Rusa I (attested 719–713) and Sargon II in western Iran culminated in yet another terrible defeat suffered by the Urartians in 714, in a battle near mount Wauš (probably mount Sahend). As a result, Rusa was abandoned by his former allies among the Mannean kings.

While the Urartians lost their outlying positions and zones of influence in Syria, in the Taurus, and in western Iran, their kingdom as such survived, despite two deep Assyrian incursions. First, in 735, Tušpa, the Urartian main fortress, withstood an attack by Tiglath-pileser III. Then, in 714, Sargon II laid waste irrigation systems, gardens, settlements, and a number of fortresses around Lake Urmia that had been evacuated by the Urartians. But none of the defended strongholds fell and the inhabitants of the invaded areas, informed in time by an early warning system, managed to escape with their flocks long before the Assyrians could get at them. The subsequent sack of Mušašir and the local shrine of the god Haldi was certainly a heavy blow for the Urartians, but Mušašir as such was not part of the Urartian state and its defense system.

After one and a half centuries of warfare, the stalemate between Assyria's offensive power and Urartian defensive strength was accepted as a matter of fact by both sides. Still there was no love between the two powers, with intrigues, small scale raids, and ambushes continuing along the common border. But after 714, both Assyria and Urartu avoided open war on a larger scale. When the murderers of Sennacherib found refuge in Urartu, the Urartian king did not use these exiled Assyrian princes to destabilize Esarhaddon's rule (Fuchs 2012: 142–4), and he abstained from doing so even when Esarhaddon annexed the contested kingdom of Šubria. Likewise, Assurbanipal left an Urartian attack on the Šubrian city of Upumu unanswered.

In the seventh century BCE, the official image of the Urartian king underwent a fundamental change. Argišti II (attested in 709) was the last Urartian king to leave detailed records of his military achievements, whereas his successors commemorated their building activities only. Since Assyrian sources are likewise uninformative for that period, no more than the most basic facts of

Urartu's later political history are known. Even the exact sequence of the late Urartian rulers has recently become a matter of debate (see Seidl, Roaf, and Fuchs in: Kroll et al. 2012).

In the first half of the seventh century, the extensive building activities of Rusa, son of Erimena, and of Rusa, son of Argišti, at Toprakkale, Karmir-blur, Bastam, Ayanis, and Kef Kalesi, with their splendid fortification works, palaces, and temples, probably marked the apogee of the Urartian kingdom.

This high-water mark was followed by sharp and rapid decline. Neither the exact reasons nor the course of the events resulting in Urartu's downfall are known, but the Assyrians apparently had no part in it. Already in the late 640s, the situation of Sarduri (III/IV?), the last Urartian king mentioned in Assyrian sources, had become so desperate that he took the humiliating step to acknowledge Assyrian superiority by sending tribute to Assurbanipal. The kingdom of Biainili/Urartu as such must have ceased to exist soon afterwards, since the Urartians were not involved in the prolonged struggles between 627 and 610, which eventually led to Assyria's own demise (Hellwag 2012).

To sum up, Assyria and Urartu were expansionist rivals from the middle of the ninth up to the end of the eighth century, and they coexisted in the seventh century. Urartu was never a deadly threat to the Assyrian empire. Usually the conflict between the two powers was restricted to the Taurus and to western Iran; only for a short period in the eighth century Urartu managed to infiltrate northern Syria. Whilst their own core area around Lake Van was raided at least twice by the Assyrians, the Urartians stayed on their, i.e. on the northern side of the Taurus, and never, not even in the heyday of their power and influence during the first half of the eighth century, did they dare to come down to the Mesopotamian lowlands to attack Assyria proper.

The Urartians certainly had dangerous foes other than just Assyria. In 714, when Sargon II after a large detour fell upon the remote eastern parts of the Urartian kingdom, which never before had been reached by Assyrian armies, he ran into an elaborate defense system consisting of fortresses, a warning system, and perfectly functioning evacuation procedures. These precautionary measures could not have been implemented for fear of Assyrian attacks, simply because the Urartians had no reason to expect the Assyrians at so far a distance from their usual attack zones. The enemy against whom the Urartians had protected these border sections in the first place is still unknown.

At least one danger the kings of Urartu had to cope with is identified by Assyrian sources: in 709 BCE, the Assyrian secret service reported on a heavy defeat suffered by the Urartian king from the hands of a strong Cimmerian warrior group in the course of a campaign somewhere beyond Urartu's northern borders (Fuchs 2012: 155), and Urartian territory was raided by Cimmerians soon afterwards. Eventually, the crisis passed and, in the reign of Esarhaddon, Cimmerians are even mentioned as allies or auxiliaries of the

Urtartian king. But the relationship must have changed again dramatically in the second half of the seventh century: according to the archaeological evidence, nomadic horsemen of Cimmerian and Scythian origin were involved in the final destruction of quite a number of Urtartian fortresses.

The Western Taurus and Central Anatolia

In the Old Assyrian period, merchants from Ashur were busy in central Anatolia, but their caravan trade and the existence and survival of their trading colonies (*kārum*) – among them the well documented *kārum* of the Anatolian city of Kaniš (modern Kültepe) – depended entirely on the good will of the local rulers, with no chance whatsoever for the early rulers of Ashur to exert political or military power (Veenhof and Eidem 2008).

In the Middle Assyrian period, central Anatolia was at first the core of the mighty Hittite empire and as such far beyond reach even for the comparatively powerful Assyrian rulers of the 13th century. At the beginning of the 12th century, Ḫatti disintegrated at last, but the Assyrians could not exploit the fall of their former rival, since they were in dire straits themselves.

It was not before the ninth century, the reign of Shalmaneser III, that central Anatolia got involved into the power politics of Assyria, but in this particular part of the world, even the most powerful of the Neo-Assyrian kings were faced with insurmountable problems. Within or beyond the western Taurus, the Neo-Assyrian provincial system was never established and even the most basic forms of indirect rule had to be maintained with substantial efforts. Furthermore, any change of the local situation regularly resulted in the complete loss of Assyria's influence.

For the most part, these difficulties were, of course, caused by the mountains of the western Taurus and their inaccessibility. Deeply hidden in these mountains was the land of Ḫilakku, the name of which was also used in the Assyrian sources as a synonym for the western Taurus as such. To the Assyrians, Ḫilakku offered no specific resources; the local settlements were numerous but none of them was worth to be mentioned by name. Politically, Ḫilakku was a mere nuisance for Assyria, difficult to reach and even more difficult to control. Several kings claimed to have defeated the people of Ḫilakku, but these victories were short-lived at best, and no lasting relationship with Assyria could ever be established.

There were two main routes the Assyrian armies used to cross the western Taurus: one led from Que (the Cilician lowlands) via the Cilician gates to the area of modern Ereğli and Niğde; the other went from Meliddu (near modern Malatya) via Til-Garimmu (modern Gürün?) to the area of modern Kayseri.

As far as central Anatolia beyond the western Taurus mountains is concerned, the name Tabal is prominent in the Assyrian sources. Unfortunately it is used with two different meanings: in a broader geographical sense, the term sums up all of central Anatolia, whereas in political terms, Tabal designates a specific kingdom in the region of modern Kayseri, whose kings claimed supreme rank over all their neighbors.

Central Anatolia was politically divided into more than a dozen highly developed city states, whose Luwian-speaking inhabitants continued the practice of writing the hieroglyphic script of the Hittites, which at that time was widely used also in northern Syria. Unfortunately, this script usually seems to have been written on perishable materials, and the few hieroglyphic stone inscriptions preserved provide just glimpses of the local culture(s) and history. For the Assyrians, central Anatolia was a rich source of precious metals and stones, and as a horse breeding area second in rank only to western Iran.

When Shalmaneser III crossed the western Taurus in 836 and in 835 BCE, he found the people of central Anatolia in no mood to fight. The local kings followed the example of king Tuwatis (Tuatti in the Assyrian sources) of Tabal, who sent his son with presents to buy the Assyrians off. Soon afterwards, however, Shalmaneser's overextended empire crumbled, and so Assyria's debut in central Anatolia was but a short intermezzo with no consequences.

The aforementioned king Tuwatis of Tabal might have been a representative – or perhaps even the founder – of a local dynasty wielding some sort of supreme power over the whole region. To the Urartians, Tabal was the “land of Tuatē,” on which the Urartian king Argišti I enforced a pay-off in the 770s (Salvini 2008: A 8–3 II 15–16). Somewhat later, another Tuwatis as well as his son and successor Wasusarmas both claimed the title of “great king” according to inscriptions from the latter's reign (Hawkins 2000: 451 ff. X.12 and X.13).

Wasusarmas was a contemporary of Tiglath-pileser III, whose reign was to become the peak of Assyria's influence in central Anatolia. Already in 738, five kings from this region, among them “Wassurme the Tabalean,” sent presents or tribute to Assyria, but their submissiveness cannot be explained by Assyrian pressure, since in central Anatolia Tiglath-pileser's military power was not felt before the end of the 730s. It is more likely that those local rulers tried to buy Assyrian help against the powerful kingdom of Mušku, better known as Phrygia, whose eastward expansion might have been well under way in the early 730s.

Pressed by Mušku from the west and by Assyria from the east, the Anatolian kings struggled to survive. They even tried to exploit the rivalry between the two powers to their own benefit, but the results of their machinations were

rather mixed and sometimes disastrous.

Wasusarmas was among the first victims of the difficult situation: When he stopped his payments to Assyria around 730 BCE, he was deposed by Tiglath-pileser, whose inscriptions ridicule the presumptuousness of the great king: “Wassurme, the Tabalean, who acted as if he were the equal of Assyria” was arrested by just one of Tiglath-pileser’s eunuchs, and, as a further humiliation, he was replaced by Ḫullī, who was a “son of a nobody,” i.e. not of royal descent. Thus, the dynasty of Tuwatis was replaced by the “house of Purutaš.” The price Ḫullī had to pay for his enthronement, 10 talents of gold, 1000 talents (32 tons) of silver and 2000 horses, bears witness to Tabal’s wealth (Tadmor and Yamada 2011: no. 47 rev. 14’–15’; no. 49 rev. 27).

However, Tabal was not to come to rest. Ḫullī was deposed by Shalmaneser V and exiled to Assyria, where he became friends with Shalmaneser’s brother Sargon. As soon as the latter had usurped Assyria’s throne, Ḫullī was reinstated in Tabal, and when he died, his son and successor Ambaris was given Sargon’s daughter in marriage. Even so, Ambaris forged an alliance with both Mušku and Urartu and attacked Assyrian territory. In 713, the troops of Assyria’s western provinces were sent in and soon the members of the house of Purutaš dragged themselves to Assyria in chains, among them Sargon’s treacherous son-in-law who, unlike his father, got no second chance.

The events in Tabal were just one episode in the much larger conflict between Assyria and Mita, king of Mušku, who was known to the Greeks as Midas, king of Phrygia. With the core area of his kingdom and his capital Gordion far off in the west, in the area around the Sangarios river, Mita had the advantage to act from a safe distance.

Time and again Mita succeeded to win over Sargon’s vassals or allies to his own side, in spite of harsh Assyrian reactions. In 718 the king of Šinuḫtu was punished for his defection to Mita. In 713, as we have seen, Ambaris of Tabal, Sargon’s most favored vassal, had to be deposed for the same reason. In the next year, Mita not only thwarted Sargon’s plan to reestablish Tabal as an Assyrian province, he even succeeded to win over the king of Meliddu, another Assyrian vassal, whose kingdom was annexed by Sargon in 711. Fortifying Til-Garimmu (modern Gürün?), a place along the road leading from Meliddu to Tabal, in order to block further Phrygian advances, Sargon resigned himself to the complete loss of all his former positions in central Anatolia.

Mita was troublesome for his intrigues, but he posed no direct threat. Well aware of his inferior military strength, Mita wisely avoided any major battles, attacking only when he was sure of the dreaded Assyrian army to be busy elsewhere, and due to this military weakness he was never able to hold his gains against counterattacks. In 715, it was a mere sideshow for the Assyrian forces to recover three fortresses Mita had taken in the province of Que

(Cilicia). Eventually, it was the governor of that province whose relentless attacks brought the conflict to an end: in the wake of a particularly devastating raid deep into the territory of Mušku in 710, Mita made a peace offer, which was gladly accepted by Sargon in 709.

In the meantime, an enemy even more dangerous than Mita had emerged. Should all those contemporary hints at an Anatolian ruler named Kurtis (Kurti or Gurdi in the Assyrian sources) refer to one and the same person, Sargon and Sennacherib were faced by an adversary of a truly Machiavellian character. In 718, Sargon entrusted Kurtis, the king of (A)tuna, with the kingdom of Šinuḫtu, whose treacherous ruler had just been removed. Soon afterwards, Kurtis went over to Mita of Mušku, but in 713, doubtlessly worried by the fate of Ambaris of Tabal, he made another about-turn: he sent his messenger to hurry after Sargon, who was campaigning in western Iran, until he caught up with him somewhere deep in Media. In the Assyrian field camp, Kurtis's diplomat succeeded to reconcile Sargon with his not so loyal master.

This was, however, not the end of the story. In 709, Kurtis's (A)tunaeans are mentioned fighting for the possession of Tabal, and he must have prevailed against his Anatolian rivals, for soon afterwards he challenged the Assyrians openly, probably by taking their border fortress of Til-Garimmu. In 705, a punitive expedition was under way against him, but against all expectations, it was Sargon, not Kurtis, who, under circumstances unknown, met his doom in Tabal. This surprising outcome, which provided Kurtis with a prominent place in history, was perhaps not just a matter of bad luck on Sargon's side. Since another army sent by Sennacherib in the following year achieved nothing either, Kurtis's skills and his military strength must have been important factors too. Til-Garimmu was recovered by the Assyrians only much later, in 695 – but since Kurtis was neither killed nor captured in the event, he must have been still at large afterwards. As far as we know, Sennacherib never attacked him again.

In the 670s, when Esarhaddon resumed the policy of military intervention in central Anatolia, both Kurtis and the kingdom of Mušku had disappeared from the scene. At that time, Anatolia, Urartu, and western Iran had become playing grounds for Cimmerian warrior groups, active as raiders but also as auxiliary troops supporting local rulers. However, in central and western Anatolia they were to become an independent political factor of their own, and only the Cimmerian leaders active in central Anatolia were important enough to be mentioned by name in the inscriptions of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. In 679, for instance, “the Cimmerian Teušpa, a barbarian from afar” (Leichty 2011: 1 III 43), was defeated and killed in battle by Esarhaddon's troops in the territory of Ḫubušna (the region of modern Ereğli).

The Assyrian victory relieved central Anatolia from the Cimmerian pressure,

but did little to strengthen Esarhaddon's own position in this region. A campaign directed against "Ḫilakku, in the neighborhood of Tabal" (Leichty 2011: 1 iii 47f.), was a temporary success at best, whereas Išallu, the king of Tabal, did not submit to Esarhaddon at all.

In the 670s, the greatest cause of concern for the Assyrians was Mugallu, an Anatolian warlord whose origins and base of power are still unknown. Every bit as dangerous as Kurtis had been, Mugallu was even more audacious. Unimpressed by Esarhaddon's recent victory over the Cimmerians, he took by force the city of Meliddu, a cornerstone in Assyria's northwestern border defenses. In his time, "Mugallu of Melid," as he was now called, was the only enemy of Assyria, who not only wrested an important stronghold from the Assyrian empire but even managed to hold his ground afterwards: in 675, he withstood a full-scale Assyrian siege of Meliddu, and in the following years he thwarted all further attempts to dislodge him from this city.

In view of Esarhaddon's complete lack of success, it is no surprise that his royal inscriptions keep silent about Mugallu. Instead, he figures prominently in prophecy, astrological reports, and magic rituals. An eclipse that seemed to predict Mugallu's imminent natural death and a lengthy prophecy including a promise of the goddess Ištar to destroy Melid document both the frustration and the wishful thinking of Esarhaddon and his court. In real life, the power and prestige of the loathed enemy only grew. After he had taken over, friendly or not, the kingdom of Tabal, "Mugallu of Melid" became known as "Mugallu of Tabal" in Assurbanipal's reign.

Mugallu was, however, wise enough not to try his luck too often. After the conquest of Meliddu, he made no further attempt to expand his territory at Assyria's expense. Instead, he tried to enter, although in vain, into negotiations with Esarhaddon.

Then, suddenly, soon after Assurbanipal had ascended the throne, most dramatic events forced even the formidable Mugallu to formally submit to the Assyrians. His change of mind was caused by the Cimmerians, who in the early 660s reappeared on the scene as a threat more deadly than ever. Perhaps their numerous warrior groups, which hitherto had acted independently from each other and were scattered over a vast area stretching from Anatolia deep into western Iran, had joint their forces in central Anatolia.

Hard-pressed as they were, the Anatolian rulers turned to Assyria for help as to the only power able to halt the new Cimmerian onslaught. Even an envoy from Lydia, a kingdom far off in western Anatolia, arrived by ship at the Mediterranean coast, with gifts and a nice story: in a dream, so the court at Nineveh was told, the god Ashur had appeared to Gyges, the king of Lydia (Guggu, king of Luddu in the Assyrian sources), promising him instant victory over the Cimmerians as soon as he, Gyges, submitted to Assurbanipal.

Since the Cimmerians, at least for the time being, abstained from raids against

Assyria proper, their frightening presence in Anatolia was a great stroke of luck for Assurbanipal, who took full advantage of his favorable position. He condescendingly accepted the submission of the Anatolian rulers and cashed in their tribute, but he did nothing at all to help them. Assurbanipal's policy of splendid inactivity worked extremely well for more than twenty years. First cracks appeared in the early 650s, when Gyges broke off his useless relations with Assyria and even supported the efforts of the Egyptian pharaoh Psammetichus to throw the Assyrians out of Egypt. But Lydia as such was of no great significance for Assyria. Mugallu of Tabal was much more important, and as an immediate neighbor of Assyria he had no choice but to remain submissive in order to avoid a war on two fronts. In 651, he was still paying his tribute, and when he died, the succession of his son [M]ussi(?) was approved by Assurbanipal.

In the 640s, however, under the leadership of Dugdamme, the Cimmerians intensified their activities again. Far in the west, Gyges of Lydia lost his life fighting against them, and his son Ardys once again (and again in vain) tried to get help from Assyria. Around 645 BCE, the era of peace and stability along Assyria's northwestern frontier came to a sudden end, when [M]ussi of Tabal yielded to the Cimmerian pressure and defected to Dugdamme. Tabal, which hitherto had functioned as an effective if unwilling shield against the Cimmerian threat, suddenly became a deployment area for Cimmerian raids against Assyria's northwestern provinces (Fuchs 2010).

Unfortunately, the picture of what happened next is blurred by the peculiarities of Assurbanipal's latest inscriptions and their preference for tales of miracles and divine interventions: the fire god, we are told, "burnt" [M]ussi of Tabal, and when the Cimmerians invaded Assyrian territory, the same fire god fell from heaven "burning" Dugdamme, his warriors, and his camp, whereupon the Cimmerian leader submitted to Assurbanipal. Soon afterwards, however, Dugdamme broke his oath and attacked again, but the gods struck him with a terrible disease, from which he died in agony, shortly before 639. Later on, Dugdamme's son Sandakurru, unimpressed by his father's miserable end, resumed the attacks until he too was finished off by Assurbanipal's gods. These awkwardly distorted stories are the latest news concerning events in central Anatolia that are mentioned in Assyrian texts. According to Greek sources, the Cimmerians were defeated at last by the kings of Lydia, who in the course of the sixth century expanded their kingdom over most parts of central Anatolia.

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Further Reading

Salvini 1995 and Kroll et al. 2012 provide excellent overviews of the Assyrian empire's relations with the territories to its north, especially Urartu. Radner 2012 discusses the buffer states located between Urartu and Assyria.

CHAPTER 12

Assyria and the East: Western Iran and Elam

Andreas Fuchs

To the east, Mesopotamia is bounded by what we call today the Zagros mountains. To the Assyrians, who used no such name, these were simply “the mountains,” *šadû*. Running parallel to the river Tigris, the Zagros range is a most formidable geographical barrier that effectively separates Mesopotamia from the lands further east. Quite a number of paths wind their ways through valleys and gorges, over passes and streams, eventually allowing access to the world beyond, but most of them are difficult to use. The Assyrians were especially impressed by the highest ranges of the Zagros, which are found along the watershed running along the modern border between Iraq and Iran. A particularly awe-inspiring peak somewhere to the east of the modern city of Sulaimaniye they even identified with the mythical Mount Nimuš, on which once the boat of Utnapištim, the Mesopotamian Noah, had run aground when the waters of the Deluge receded (George 2003: 516).

In ancient Near Eastern times the highlands east of Mesopotamia formed two regions, which differed in virtually every respect, in cultural, linguistic, political as well as in economic terms. In the south, in modern Khuzestan and Fars, the land of Elam represented one of the great civilizations of the ancient world. In constant exchange with Mesopotamia, the Elamites had developed a distinctive culture of their own. In all material and practical aspects of life as highly developed as their contemporary Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian neighbors, the Elamites worshipped their own gods, and many of their customs differed from those in Mesopotamia. They had adopted the Mesopotamian cuneiform script, but used it to write their own language. In the field of international politics, the kings of Elam were major players – in the second half of the second millennium they were on par with the rulers of Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, and Hatti.

Further west, in contrast, many of the petty kingdoms of the region between the parallel chains of the Zagros mountains separating Mesopotamia from the highlands of Iran never reached a level of complexity that required the use of a script, even in the first millennium BCE. Notable exceptions were the areas along the segment of the Great Khorasan Road between modern Sar-e Pol-e Zohab, Kermanshah, and Hamadan. Connecting the lowlands east of the Tigris with the Iranian plateau, this region was always in close contact with

Mesopotamia. Further east, the Iranian plateau, more or less isolated from the core areas of the ancient Near Eastern civilizations by the formidable chains of the Zagros, was a cultural backwater. In general, outside Elam proper not a single settlement comparable in size or importance to the great urban centers of Mesopotamia or Syria seems to have existed in Iran.

During the third and second millennia, occasional invaders from the Zagros, the Gutians, the Turukkeans, and the Kassites, had a considerable impact on Mesopotamian history, but no political entity of more than local significance emerged within the mountains proper. In the first millennium, according to the Neo-Assyrian sources, most parts of the Zagros and the Iranian plateau were politically fragmented to the extreme. The sudden rise of the Medes to the rank of a great power at the very end of the seventh century, and the decisive part they played in Assyria's downfall, was without precedent and came as a complete surprise.

The Babylonians and the Assyrians had a strong negative bias towards their eastern neighbors. Since the end of the third millennium, when the Gutian invaders had caused considerable turmoil in parts of southern Mesopotamia, the name of this group was used to sum up indiscriminately all eastern mountain dwellers. Thus, the term "Gutian" stood for the dangerous, uncivilized, and bone idle barbarian from the mountains as such. As long as these people posed no imminent threat, the Mesopotamians did not care much about them.

From time immemorial, however, the lowlanders had considerable economic interests in the eastern highlands. These mountains abounded in natural resources, including sheep, metals, and timber, and they were crossed by trade routes that provided access to precious goods from even more distant lands, like the famous lapis lazuli coming from as far away as Afghanistan. In the mid-second millennium, when the use of horses became a decisive factor in warfare, the economic and strategic value of the Zagros and the Iranian plateau increased dramatically. The armies of the Neo-Assyrian empire depended on a steady supply of horses, which were bred by the people of western Iran.

What follows is a very short overview of the interactions between Assyria and the lands of the East.

The Assyrian Expansion in the East

Efforts in the Middle Assyrian period to subject the inhabitants of the mountains north and east of the Assyrian core region to Assyrian rule met with no lasting success. As for the Zagros mountains, most military operations at that time were still confined to the areas west of the chaîne magistrale. In

1112 BCE, Tiglath-pileser I led his army right through the lands of Nairi up to the city of Melid, but his epic campaign was of no lasting consequence (Grayson 1991: 20ff. iv 40–v 41).

Since the reign of Assurnāṣirpal I (1049–1031) at the latest, Assyria was in contact with the kingdom of Gilzanu (Grayson 1991: 255, 4'; Frahm, KAL 3: 117–23). For the next two hundred years this small kingdom south of Lake Urmia functioned as an emporium where horses from more distant regions further east could be acquired in considerable quantities. At the end of the 10th century, the Neo-Assyrian kings started to expand into the mountain areas west of the chaîne magistrale, but as long as Assyria's symbiotic relationship with Gilzanu remained unchallenged, there was no need to expand into western Iran.

In the late 860s, however, Gilzanu came under attack from the rising power of Urartu. Unable to solve this problem effectively, Assyria was now in need of a second supply line from the Iranian plateau, which had to be out of Urartian reach, and the need became even more urgent when Gilzanu fell prey to the Urartians in the 820s. Since 843 serious efforts, focused on the Khorasan road and the kingdom of Namri (around modern Kermanshah), were made to establish a permanent foothold beyond the chaîne magistrale, but local resistance proved to be much stronger than anticipated, and the first attempts of conquest came to nothing accordingly. Only after the devastation of Babylonia's power by Šamši-Adad V had cleared the way, the Assyrians finally managed to annex Namri, probably in 797.

In the second half of the eighth century the Assyrian expansion in Iran made two more leaps eastward along the Khorasan road. In 744 Tiglath-pileser III set up the provinces of Parsua and Bit-Ḫamban (north and east of Namri), and in 716 Sargon II added the provinces of Kišesim and Ḫarḫar (both east of Bit-Ḫamban). To these provinces some minor conquests were added later on, and it was the city of Ḫarḫar (not localized) that became Assyria's most important stronghold in western Iran.

For centuries the whole area annexed by Assyria between 797 and 716 had been under Babylonian influence – right into the 10th century it had even been part of the Babylonian kingdom. Accustomed to rule and taxation, first by Babylonian kings and then by local rulers, but politically fragmented and with no shared identity, the area met perfectly the requirements to establish direct Assyrian rule. In contrast, for various reasons the lands beyond were much less suited to be incorporated into the empire.

Around 700 BCE direct contact with the most important horse breeding regions was firmly established, and with the supply lines leading there as safe as they could be, Assyria's mission in Iran was accomplished and her eastward expansion ended. The Assyrian kings began to shift their attention elsewhere: Sennacherib's eastern campaign of 702 was probably the last one

led by an Assyrian king in person – afterwards Sennacherib and his successors delegated all military operations in Iran to trusted subordinates. For most of the seventh century, the situation in Assyria's eastern provinces was more or less stable. They lived through their own share of troubles and witnessed occasional raids from unfriendly neighbors, but these were isolated and comparatively harmless events, none of which warranted the entire army to be brought into action.

In the reign of Sîn-šarru-iškun, the situation suddenly changed, and in 615 at the latest, all of Assyria's Zagros provinces had been overrun by the Medes. But it is still unclear how all this happened and when the Medes had begun to unite against the Assyrians.

Western Iran beyond Assyria's Provinces

In western Iran the territory held by Assyria since 716 bordered on four regions of different size, each of them inhabited by people completely different from each other in language, culture, and political organization:

1. North of the Assyrian province of Parsua, the Manneans inhabited large parts of what is now Iranian Azerbaijan. Assyrian and Urartian sources seem to use the terms "Mannaya" and "Mana" somewhat differently. To the Assyrians, they applied primarily to the king ruling in the city of Izirtu, i.e. the ruler of the Mannean polity nearest to Assyria. This, however, was a gross oversimplification. According to Urartian sources many Mannean lands existed east of Izirtu and were independent from it.

Occasionally, Assyrian sources mention these other Mannean kingdoms and rulers as well, indicating that they were fierce enemies of the kings of Izirtu and even surpassed them in power. But only the history of the kingdom of Izirtu can be reconstructed to some extent. In the ninth century, Izirtu was just one among several petty kingdoms in the region around the modern town of Saqqez. The role ascribed in the Assyrian sources to its first attested king, Udaki, was far from impressive. In 827 he fled to the safety of the mountains, when an Assyrian army approached the city of "Zirta," i.e. Izirtu.

In the first half of the eighth century, "Mana" was invaded by the Urartians time and again, but the repeated efforts of Išpueni, Minua, Argišti I and Sarduri II to expand their power into the lands east and south of Lake Urmia met with no lasting success. Surprisingly, in these very same times of trouble and turmoil, the kings of Izirtu not only managed to survive, they even succeeded in increasing their own power considerably. Somehow they brought most of their neighboring rulers under their control and transformed their kingdom into a local power both the Urartians and Assyrians had to

reckon with.

If both of these “superpowers” were active at the same time, as in the second half of the eighth century, the kings of Izirtu used one of these to fend off the other. In 744 king Iranzu made his choice and met Tiglath-pileser III in person. Since Iranzu’s kingdom Mannaya/Izirtu was perfectly suited to protect the Assyrian provinces in Iran against Urartian raids from the north, both kings quickly came to terms and forged an alliance.

At the end of his reign, Iranzu’s situation deteriorated. In 719 he relied on Sargon II for military assistance against the encroachment of his most dangerous Mannean rival, Metatti, the king of Zikirtu, who was allied with the Urartians. When Iranzu died, his son and successor Aza soon fell prey to his ambitious brother Ullusun, who first seized the throne by force with Urartian assistance but changed sides immediately when Sargon II attacked him in 716 and became Assyria’s most valuable eastern ally. Ullusun’s ruthless machinations triggered off two years (715–714) of fierce fighting, in which Assyria and Mannaya/Izirtu stood against Urartu and the Mannean kingdoms of Zikirtu, Andia, and Wišdiš. Eventually, the Urartian king Rusa suffered a major defeat and lost his former influence in Mannea, while his former allies Zikirtu and Andia made their peace with Sargon. The true winner was, of course, Ullusun, whose position was now indisputable and stronger than ever.

Shortly before 700 the situation changed, when warrior groups, first of Cimmerian and subsequently of Scythian origin, appeared in western Iran. In the time of Sennacherib the hitherto good relations between Izirtu and Assyria must have come to an end. Aḥšeri, the next king of Zikirtu known from our sources, closely cooperated with the Cimmerian and Scythian newcomers, and soon he and his barbarian friends raided Assyrian territory. Esarhaddon tried by every means to stop this nuisance. His troops fended off raiding parties and killed the Scythian leader Iṣpakaya; his diplomats negotiated with Cimmerians in order to isolate Aḥšeri from his allies; and he even considered giving his daughter to the Scythian king Bartatua in marriage. In 676, however, an attack against Aḥšeri’s kingdom failed and in spite of all his efforts Esarhaddon was unable to solve his Mannean problem.

It was not before 663, perhaps even later in the reign of Assurbanipal, and only after Aḥšeri’s Cimmerian and Scythian protectors had left western Iran, that the Assyrians dared to send an army against Izirtu once again. The campaign as such met with rather modest success, but soon afterwards Aḥšeri was murdered “by his own servants.” In his weakened position, his son and successor Walli made peace with Assyria and came to a lasting accommodation with Assurbanipal. As late as in 616, Mannean auxiliary troops fought on Sîn-šar-iškun’s side against the Babylonians in the Euphrates valley.

1. Mannea and Media were separated by two rather mysterious regions: Gizilbunda, of which almost nothing is known, appears as a loosely organized kingdom at the end of the ninth century, only to reappear in the sources at the end of the eighth century as a politically divided region. The rulers of Bit-Abdadani usually were on good terms with Assyria. For that very reason virtually nothing is known about them or their land, since the Assyrian sources mostly report on enemies but only rarely on friends.
2. By far the largest and most important population group on the Iranian plateau were the Medes. Their huge numbers and the vast area they inhabited seem to have caused some anxiety among the Assyrians, but up to the very end of the seventh century, there is no mention of any Median activity outside Media proper, which must have comprised most of the Iranian plateau between the Zagros and the Alborz mountains.

Apart from the horses bred by the locals in great numbers, this vast area offered nothing of interest. Settlements comparable to the contemporary urban centers of Mesopotamia or the Levant did not exist and the widely spread population seems to have been rather poor. According to the Assyrian sources of the eighth and seventh centuries the Medes (like the people of Gizilbunda, see paragraph (2) above) were ruled by a bewildering multitude of “community lords” (*bēl āli*), a term used for uncivilized petty rulers too unimportant to be called kings. In 713 Sargon II received tribute from no fewer than forty-five “community lords,” but the total number of Median rulers might have been even higher. And there were differences between them: in 737, rulers from Gizilbunda and Media each delivered between thirty-two and 300 horses to Tiglath-pileser III, indicating that the richest “community lords” were ten times wealthier than the poorest. Since some settlements had not one but two lords ruling side by side, the political organization of the Medes was probably quite unique and not strictly monarchical as in Assyria (Fuchs 1994: 122f., 191–4; Tadmor and Yamada 2011: 86, ii 30’–44’).

Campaigning in Media posed no particular challenge to the Assyrian military. Constantly at odds with each other and surprisingly unable to organize themselves, the Medes were virtually defenseless even against Assyrian armies of smaller size. Fortified settlements, if defended at all, were captured easily, but apart from the horses, the booty taken was never worth mentioning.

Assyria conquered only a tiny part of Media’s western fringes, and was satisfied to keep the vast remainder under indirect control. From 716 onwards, the situation in Media was carefully watched by the Assyrian governors residing in Ḫarḫar and Kišesim, who doubtlessly made full use of the intrigues and mutual backstabbing of their Median neighbors. For more than a century nothing changed – even the temporary presence of Cimmerian and

Scythian warrior groups in the first half of the seventh century only added to the chaos already existing. A certain Median “community lord” named Kaštaritu caused some trouble in the time of Esarhaddon, but never posed a serious threat.

It was near the very end of the seventh century that the situation in Media changed most dramatically. Unfortunately, no contemporary sources are available to explain in detail what happened: A leader called Umakištar in the Babylonian sources and Cyaxares by the Greeks somehow managed to set up some sort of a Median kingdom and brought together an extremely powerful army. By taking the lead in the complete annihilation of Assyria between 615 and 610, he established the place of the Medes in world history.

1. The kingdom of Ellipi (or: Ellibi) controlled most of what is now called Luristan. Situated between the Assyrian Zagros provinces, Media, and Elam, Ellipi managed to stay independent for quite some time thanks to its difficult terrain and relative inaccessibility: it was surrounded from all sides by high mountain ranges.

As early as in 843, “Barû the Elippaeen” came with gifts to meet Shalmaneser III, when the latter campaigned in Namri. The next contact with Assyria is recorded a hundred years later, in 744, when king Dalta came to terms with Tiglath-pileser III. Towards the end of the century Ellipi faced a series of domestic troubles and lived through several Assyrian invasions. In 713, a full scale military intervention by Sargon II was necessary in order to restore Dalta’s rule, which seems to have been at the brink of collapse. After Dalta’s demise in 708 his nephews Išpabara and Nibe fought for the throne. With Sargon’s help, Išpabara defeated Nibe and his Elamite auxiliaries and conquered the throne in 707, only to conspire against Assyria immediately afterwards. In response, Sennacherib invaded Ellipi in 702, but he was unable to capture Išpabara or even to depose him. In 691, warriors from Ellipi fought side by side with the Elamites against Sennacherib in the battle of Ḫalule. It is, however, unclear if at that time the kingdom of Ellipi as such still existed, since it seems to have fallen apart at last: In the seventh century, Ellipi was no longer ruled by kings, but by “community lords” (*bēl āli*), like those in Media, some of whom were dependent on Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. Just how many “community lords” coexisted within the territory of the former kingdom is unknown.

Elam and Anšan

From the third millennium BCE onwards, Elam had been a major power in Western Asia. With Babylonia between them for most of the second millennium, Assyria and Elam usually shared no common border and had

accordingly no trouble with each other. Only the temporary Babylonian breakdowns in the late 13th and again in the middle of the 12th centuries led to direct clashes between the two powers. At the very end of the ninth century, after the near total collapse of Babylonia and the conquests of Šamši-Adad V, Assyria and Elam became direct neighbors once again. In the meantime, the splendor of the glorious days of the “kings of Susa and Anšan” had gone: disastrously defeated by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar I (1123–1102), Elam suffered a long period of weakness and obscurity. Eventually, the whole land of Anšan (approximately the modern Iranian province of Fars) was lost under unknown circumstances. Thus reduced in size to the land of Susa (modern Khuzestan), the kingdom was left with no more than just the western half of its former territory.

For 350 years, up to the middle of the eighth century, sources for matters Elamite are almost completely lacking. Even the Assyrian inscriptions are all but talkative. In 815, Šamši-Adad V identified warriors from Elam among his defeated enemies, and in the following year he reached the Elamite border. Moreover, envoys from Elam are known to have visited the Assyrian court in Kalḫu in the early eighth century. However, until 743 not a single Elamite king is mentioned (Potts 1999: 262f., Waters 2000: 10f.).

From the Elamite point of view, the uneasy relationship with Assyria was tolerable as long as the kings of Ashur did not go further than Šamši-Adad V. The real trouble began when Tiglath-pileser III resumed Assyria’s expansion and made efforts to gain direct control over Babylonia. If he succeeded, the Elamites must have thought, in absorbing the numerous tribes and cities of southern Mesopotamia into his realm, Elam would have to stand alone against the fearsome Assyrian juggernaut in future conflicts. So it seemed better to act in time rather than wait for the enemy to attack later, when the conditions might have changed even more in his favor.

Seriously reduced in strategic depth through the loss of Anšan, the Elamites had to keep the war at a safe distance from their own territory and did all they could to keep the enemy busy elsewhere. So they instigated and supported local rebellions against Assyrian rule in neighboring Babylonia and offered refuge to rebels who had suffered defeats in Babylonia and were on the run from the Assyrians.

Elam’s resilience in the conflicts with Assyria was remarkable. Even in its weakened state, this kingdom was still the most formidable military power east of Assyria, technologically on par with the enemy, and able to field large armies, which were both well organized and well equipped. For more than a century, Elamite troops, supported by allied contingents of Chaldean, Aramaean, and Babylonian origins, challenged the Assyrians time and again. In 694 Sennacherib’s crown prince was captured and extradited to the Elamites, and in 691 king Ḫuban-nimena (692–688), side by side with his numerous allies from Iran and Babylonia, fought an epic battle against the

Assyrian main army in Halule. Assyria was, however, by far too big to fail at this point. Moreover, the long war against Sennacherib must have put a terrible strain on Elam, with defeats, mounting losses, and the general lack of success making the position of its kings vulnerable to rival members of the ruling family. Between 699 and 692 no fewer than three Elamite kings were assassinated or killed in revolts.

Initially, however, the Elamite worries about being doomed to become the powerful neighbor's next victim proved unfounded. It is true that both Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II imposed their rule over Babylonia against Elamite resistance and it is also true that they devastated Elam's border regions, but neither of them attacked the core area around the capital cities of Susa and Madaktu. Sennacherib built a fleet and raided Elam's seacoast in 694, but his one and only attempt to attack Madaktu (in 693) was terminated because of bad weather and never repeated. During Esarhaddon's reign and in the first years of Assurbanipal the Assyrians were at pains to coexist peacefully with Elam, to the extent that even occasional outbursts of Elamite violence against Assyrian territory went without sanctions. From the Assyrian point of view, the Elamites had to be kept out of Babylonia, but a conquest of Elam was not on the agenda.

After a period of uneasy coexistence (691–664), the situation worsened dramatically when in 664 king Urtak was murdered by his brother Teumman, who seized the throne and killed many of his rivals within the royal family. As a result, Elamite princes fled in droves to Assurbanipal, providing the Assyrian king with appropriate candidates for the throne of Elam. At first, both sides refrained from breaking the peace, but tensions increased, and in 653 Elam and Assyria were at war again. When the armies clashed on the western bank of the river Ulay, near Til-Tuba, not far from Susa, Teumman was killed and his army was virtually annihilated. It was a complete military disaster, from which Elam was never to recover.

Immediately afterwards, Assurbanipal chose Huban-nikaš (II) among the many Elamite princes who had sought asylum at Nineveh and installed him as king of Elam. Already by the very next year, however, the Assyrian plan to transform the once powerful, now defenseless Elamite neighbor into a mere puppet state was ruined by the revolt of Šamaš-šumu-ukin. From 652 up to 648 Assyria's military power was fully engaged in Babylonia, and for these five years Assurbanipal was reduced to the role of a mere spectator of the drama unfolding in Elam, where murderous infighting between the different branches of the royal family caused the kings to follow each other in rapid succession: Huban-nikaš II, Assurbanipal's own protégée, soon turned against his master and even tried – albeit in vain – to support the rebels in Babylonia. He was murdered together with his whole family by his cousin Tammariṭu, who in turn was forced into Assyrian exile by a certain Indabibi, yet another usurper, who was a mere “servant” of his predecessor, i.e. not of royal

descent. The loss of the ruling dynasty's hitherto exclusive claim to the throne paved the way for political adventurers, and soon the breakdown of the traditional order went hand in hand with territorial disintegration.

In 647, when Assurbanipal had his hands free again, Indabibi too had been killed in a revolt. Meanwhile, Elam had been broken up into at least four parts, whose rulers, mere warlords, all fought against one another. The most important among them, Īḫuban-ḫaltaš III, who was in control of the city of Madaktu, negotiated with the Assyrian king, but his overtures were turned down most arrogantly. Instead, Assurbanipal sent in his army in order to reinstall the exiled Tammārītu in the city of Susa – only to have him deposed and arrested immediately afterwards, when it was brought to his attention that his new protégée criticized him in an all too outspoken manner.

The support for Tammārītu was Assurbanipal's last attempt to reach a constructive solution, and when it failed, Assurbanipal decided to destroy what obviously could not be brought under control. In 646 Elam was ravaged by another Assyrian campaign, which was excessively brutal and destructive even for Assyrian standards. Susa, Elam's religious center and the very heart of Elamite culture, was mercilessly plundered and devastated. The Assyrian troops looted the royal palaces, destroyed the ziggurat, and deliberately desecrated temples, holy precincts, and the tombs of the Elamite kings. The Elamite warlords, too weak to check the onslaught, abandoned their people to their own fate, as they had done in 647. They hastily retreated before the advancing Assyrians in order to preserve their small armies for the more important fight against their local rivals.

Further Assyrian incursions followed: Īḫuban-ḫaltaš III was captured at last, and Pa'e, one of the numerous Elamite warlords, gave up and went into Assyrian exile. As for the events after 646, however, the reports become increasingly sketchy. It seems as if Assurbanipal's scribes were no longer interested in the details of what happened in wretched Elam, leaving us with the impression of an utterly ruined land.

* * *

And what had happened in Anšan, Elam's former eastern half? Here two new kingdoms had emerged, whose fate could not have been more different. Whereas the mysterious land of Īḫudimeri (probably near the coast of the Persian Gulf) is mentioned in the reign of Assurbanipal only and vanished afterwards without trace, the other one was to leave a lasting impression on the history of Western Asia: the land of Parsu(m)aš, Elam's eastern neighbor (not to be confused with the Assyrian province of Parsuaš in the central Zagros), appears in the Assyrian sources already in 707, when the king of Elam negotiated with the ruler of Parsumaš to receive auxiliary troops from him (Fuchs and Parpola 2001: XXXIII f.). Later, in 691, troops from "Parsuaš and Anzan" were indeed part of the coalition force, led by the king of Elam,

that fought against Sennacherib's army in the battle at Halule. Direct contact with Assyria was established only after the downfall of Elam, at around 640, when "Kuraš, the king of Parsumaš," sent his eldest son Arukku to Nineveh in order to reach an agreement with Assurbanipal. There is no direct evidence for the dynastic affiliations of this Kuraš, but there can be no doubt that his kingdom of Parsumaš was the nucleus of the later Persian empire. In the middle of the sixth century BCE, five generations after the peace mission of Kuraš's son at the court of Nineveh, another Kuraš, better known to us as the Persian king Cyrus II, grandson of Cyrus I, initiated a series of breathtaking conquests, from which emerged a new superpower, a world empire four or even five times the size of Assyria.

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CHAPTER 13

Assyria and the West: Syria and the Levant

Ariel M. Bagg

Introduction

The Assyrian conquest of the Levant (including northwestern Syria) was neither a linear nor an easy enterprise. The image of an irresistible military power that systematically defeated all foreign countries and integrated them into the empire is only partially correct. Repeatedly provinces were lost, while in other cases certain areas remained inaccessible. To construct a world empire and to maintain it is not easy, even with an absolute military superiority; world empires cannot be planned and are influenced by many unpredictable factors, both internal and external. The frequency and recurrence of uprisings on the part of relatively small political units was particularly vexing for the Assyrian kings. As a world empire that claimed to have the Levant under control, Assyria could not allow herself to remain neutral in the case of such rebellions. At most, a delay in reaction was conceivable, but not to react was impossible without endangering Assyria's own position. In the long term, Assyria's goals were reached: almost the entire region was brought under Assyrian rule, and raw materials, luxury goods, people, and animals continuously flowed into Assyria as tribute or taxes.

The Levant until the Time of Tiglath-pileser III: Exploration and Exploitation

The first phase of the Assyrian conquest of the Levant is characterized by the fact that no region west of the Euphrates River was incorporated into the empire. But the pressure increased: while Aššurnāširpal II (883–859 BCE) campaigned only once in the Levant, during the long reign of his son, Shalmaneser III (858–827 BCE), more than twenty campaigns against the western regions are attested. The difference between the activities of the two rulers is not only quantitative but also qualitative. While Aššurnāširpal's campaign was an exploration of the territory in the course of which apparently no military conflicts took place, Shalmaneser's campaigns were rather

intended to bring the area under Assyrian control. While Aššurnāširpal met little opposition, Shalmaneser fought against pertinacious adversaries.

During Aššurnāširpal's reign, the Assyrian state restored its borders to those once established by Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233–1197 [1243–1207] BCE). Its western border was the Euphrates River, and it primarily enclosed the Assyrian heartland and the Jezireh. In his ninth campaign, Aššurnāširpal crossed the Euphrates River and entered the territories of Gargamish (Carchemish) and Pattinu, which paid tribute, as well as Bit-Agusi. After a raid against Luḫuti, a land east of the Orontes, Aššurnāširpal marched to Mount Lebanon and reached the Mediterranean Sea, where he washed his weapons and offered up sacrifices to the gods. The Assyrian king received there tribute from several Phoenician coastal cities located between Arwad and Tyre. On the way back, Aššurnāširpal ascended Mount Amanus, where he cut down different kinds of trees.

The Assyrian expansion to the west began in earnest with Shalmaneser III. Over the course of twenty-one campaigns and more than thirty years, Shalmaneser succeeded in making many countries in Ḫatti (northern Syria), as well as the lands Que and Tabalu, his vassals. Moreover, three important coastal cities (Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos) paid tribute, and Jehu, the king of Israel, submitted to Assyrian power. Shalmaneser was interested in gaining control of the territories west of the Euphrates River because he wished to have access to their mineral resources and raw materials.

On the other hand, the great number of military campaigns Shalmaneser had to undertake reveals the difficulties of this enterprise. Anti-Assyrian alliances, pertinacious opponents (such as Damascus and Que), or the geography of a region (Que, for example) put limits on the Assyrian expansion. In addition, Shalmaneser's campaigns are an example of the fact that the success of a campaign depended not only on military superiority, but also on the local political situation. While some states like Kummuhu, Gurgum, or the Phoenician cities paid tribute without opposition, others offered resistance and submitted only after they were defeated. Setbacks in the conquest policy are attested in the cases of Meliddu, Pattinu, Que, and Til-Abne, which revolted after paying tribute. Finally, the campaigns against Damascus were essentially failures: hopes of conquering the city and its hinterland were given up after three attempts.

During the war of succession that broke out in Assyria after Shalmaneser's death, some vassals used the absence of Assyrian troops to free themselves from the Assyrian yoke. Thus, former vassals won back their independence for about twenty years (826–806 BCE), until Adad-nirari III's first western campaign. Adad-nirari undertook at least four campaigns (in 805, 804, 802, and 796 BCE) and needed more than ten years to win back control over the Levant. At the end of his reign, Assyria had several areas in the northern, as well as southern, Levant under control again. Nevertheless, there were no

annexations. In the north, Assyria could count Kummuhu, Arpadda, Ḥamat, probably Unqi, maybe Sam'alla and Gargamis, and, in the south, Damascus and Israel as vassals. Sidon, Tyre, probably Arwad and, for the first time, Pilistu and Edom all paid tribute and showed a strong partiality towards Assyria. Moreover, it is possible that Gurgum and Meliddu, which presumably took part in the anti-Assyrian coalition of 805 BCE, became vassals again.

In the period between 781 and 746 BCE, during which Shalmaneser IV, Aššur-dan III and Aššur-nirari V reigned, there was neither a territorial expansion in the Levant, nor were new areas integrated into the empire. Rather, the Assyrian kings were preoccupied with suppressing the independence movements of long-standing (Arpadda) and relatively new (Ḥamat, Damascus) vassals, which led to territorial losses and undermined Assyrian authority in the region. A world power cannot constantly suppress rebellions but must have its vassals firmly under control. Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BCE) was no doubt aware of this.

The Levant at the Time of Tiglath-pileser III: The Great Annexation

Tiglath-pileser's policy was innovative not because he introduced new organizational elements but because he carried through on a large scale an already existing practice: annexation. Over the course of twelve years (743–732 BCE) and eight campaigns, several states lost their independence and were incorporated into the Assyrian empire. In 743 BCE, Tiglath-pileser marched to the Levant to confront an anti-Assyrian coalition made up of Urartu, Arpadda, Meliddu, Gurgum, and Kummuhu. The submission of Arpadda, the capital of Bit-Agusi, proved particularly challenging. All together, three campaigns against the city are attested (in 742, 741, 740 BCE). Only after the third attempt, in 740 BCE, did Tiglath-pileser succeed in conquering the town. In Arpadda, the victor received tribute from Gurgum and Kummuhu, which were members of the enemy coalition, from Gargamis and Que, which had perhaps been part of the coalition and, finally, from Damascus and Tyre. After taking rich booty, the Assyrians annexed Bit-Agusi. The new province was named Arpadda, after her capital; the local name, Bit-Agusi, is not attested in the Assyrian texts after this point. The annexation of Arpadda must have put the whole area on the alert, particularly the people of the neighboring states Unqi and Ḥamat, who must have asked themselves whether it was a special measure or the beginning of a greater enterprise. With a wave of annexations starting in the regions west and south of Arpadda, they were soon to find out.

The campaign of 738 BCE was a large-scale operation that resulted in the establishment of three new provinces, Kullania, Ḥatarikka, and Ṣimirra, districts within the land of Ḥamat that had plotted against the Assyrians. The rest of Ḥamat managed to maintain a limited independence as a vassal state. According to a tribute list from 738 BCE, all countries located north of the Assyrian provinces Arpadda, Unqi, and Ḥatarikka, up to the distant Tabalu and Kasku, paid tribute to Tiglath-pileser. So did again Tyre and Damascus, and also Ḥamat, Byblos, the Arabs, and Israel.

In 734 BCE, after three years of absence, Tiglath-pileser marched for the fifth time to the Levant. In Pilistu, the Assyrian army conquered the city of Ḥazzat (Gaza). From here, Tiglath-pileser marched further southwest until he reached the “Brook of Egypt,” where he set up a stele. Probably in the same year, the submission of the Arabian tribe Mu’na took place, as well as the appointment of Idibi’ilu as a supervisor in the area of the “Brook of Egypt.” According to a tribute list from the same year, Ammon, Moab, and Edom, the Philistian cities Ḥazzat and Ashkelon, Judah, as well as Arwad on the northern coast, paid tribute after this campaign. Moreover, Tiglath-pileser earned the loyalty of the southern states without annexing them. The entire Levant seems to have been under direct or indirect Assyrian control at this point.

In 733 and 732 BCE, Tiglath-pileser carried out two campaigns against Damascus, the strongest enemy in the region, which ended with its annexation. Tiglath-pileser’s opponents were Rezin of Damascus, Pekah of Israel, Hiram of Tyre, and Mitinti of Ashkelon. After the siege of Damascus and the devastation of its surrounding area in the year 733 BCE, military actions were undertaken against Galilee and Gilead, ending with the annexation of some territories in Israel. Israel’s southern part, around the capital Samaria, was allowed to continue existing as a vassal state. In 732 BCE, the city of Damascus was eventually conquered and the country was annexed. As a consequence of these events, two new provinces were created, namely Megiddo and Damascus. The province Qarninu, whose establishment is not attested, probably originated at this time as well, when Tiglath-pileser conquered territories in the Transjordan area.

Between 740 and 732 BCE, a large part of the Syria and the Levant was thus annexed by the Assyrian empire. Newly established provinces included Arpadda (in 740 BCE), Ḥatarikka, Kullania, and Ṣimirra (in 738 BCE), probably Manṣuate and Tu’immu (in 740/738 BCE), as well as Megiddo, Damascus, Qarninu, and Ṣubat (in 732 BCE). The formerly independent states of Bit-Agusi, Unqi/Pattinu, and Damascus ceased to exist, while Ḥamat and Israel suffered substantial territorial losses. The remaining states and city-states submitted to the Assyrian ruler and paid tribute. In spite of all this, the region was not yet defeated completely and the danger of uprisings and the formation of anti-Assyrian coalitions not yet eliminated.

The Levant after Tiglath-pileser III: The Taming of the Insurgents

During the short reign of Shalmaneser V (726–722 BCE), no annexations took place. At the end of Tiglath-pileser III's reign, the Israelite territory around Samaria had bordered on the provinces of Megiddo and Qarninu, which had been established on the former territories of Israel and Damascus. The refusal by Israel's king Hoshea to pay tribute was a risky decision under such circumstances, but apparently, Assyria's military presence in the new provinces was not yet strong enough to prevent rebellions in the region. Samaria resisted Shalmaneser's siege for three years until it fell in the fall of 722 BCE. When Shalmaneser died in the winter of 722/721 BCE, the Assyrian army returned to Assyria, and the annexation and reorganization of Samaria was postponed. Sargon II (721–705 BCE), who ascended the Assyrian throne in 722, must have been involved with the conquest in some manner because his annals ascribe this success to him. When the Assyrians left the region, Ḥamat, followed by the provinces of Arpad, Šimarra, Damascus, and the newly conquered Samaria, used this unexpected opportunity to break away from Assyrian rule. In 720 BCE, Sargon II marched to the Levant and reestablished the previous order. The population of Samaria was deported, and some years later (in 715 BCE), Arabs and people from Babylonia and Ḥamat were settled there.

With Sargon II, Assyria's second extensive annexation phase in the west began. Sargon led half of his campaigns to Syria and the Levant, where the northwestern region, in particular, required his attention. During his reign, the provinces of Samaria (in 720 BCE) and Ashdod (in 711 BCE) were established. Ḥamat was annexed in 720 BCE, either as a district or as a province. In the north, the provinces of Marqasa (on the territory of Gurgum) and Kummuhu (on the territory of Meliddu and Kummuhu) were created in 711 and 708 BCE, respectively, and in 717 BCE Gargamis was probably annexed. A province established in 713 BCE in the territory of Ḥilakku and Bit-Purutaš was short-lived; in 711 BCE, the area was newly conquered, and a new province was created, with Til-Garimmu as its center, which served as a bulwark against the menace of Urartu, Kasku, and Musku. This province, too, was lost at the end of Sargon's (or in the first years of Sennacherib's) reign. Whether the provinces of Que and Sam'alla were established by Sargon or by Shalmaneser V is unclear. During the following decades, the political map of the Levant underwent no important changes, but uprisings in the region did not stop and prompted more than ten Assyrian campaigns.

The Levant did not play a special role during Sennacherib's reign (704–781 BCE); his main problem was Babylonia. Sennacherib's campaign in 701

BCE, often referred to as the campaign “against Judah” and attested in the Bible (2 Kgs 18: 13–19: 37, 2 Chr 32: 1–22, and Isa 36–7: 37; also Mic 1: 8–16), was neither a military action directed exclusively against Judah nor as important as the extensive secondary literature seems to suggest. It concerned, rather, an episode within a campaign that targeted Phoenician, Philistian, and Judaeen towns. Even if the Judah episode did not end with the conquest of Jerusalem, it was successful: Sennacherib devastated Judah, he conquered Lachish, one of the most important Judaeen towns, and handed conquered Judaeen territories over to the Philistians. Hezekiah capitulated and paid a high tribute. Jerusalem was not conquered because it was not necessary to do so after Hezekiah’s capitulation. It is not known why Sidon, the Philistian cities (Ashkelon and Ekron), and Judah revolted at that time, but it is clearly that anti-Assyrian sentiments led the political elites of Ekron to ask for help Egypt, an action sufficient to prompt an Assyrian intervention.

Like his father Sennacherib, Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE) suffered territorial losses in the northwestern regions as well as uprisings in the southern Levant during his reign. In 677 BCE, a campaign against Abdi-Milquti of Sidon took place, which ended with the establishment of the last Assyrian province in the Levant. Abdi-Milkuti had not felt obligated to follow the foreign policy of his predecessor and wanted to shake off the Assyrian yoke. Thereupon, Assyrian troops conquered Sidon, looted and destroyed it, and deported the royal family and members of the elite to Assyria. The territory of Sidon was annexed, and the city was replaced as the capital by a new settlement called Kar-Aššur-aḥu-iddina, “Esarhaddon’s Harbor.” The new capital was settled with inhabitants from Sidonian cities and deportees from the eastern areas of the empire. In addition, Esarhaddon handed the Sidonian cities of Ma’rubbu and Šariptu over to king Ba’al of Tyre. The well-known treaty between this king and Esarhaddon may have been concluded in 676 BCE, after the conquest of Sidon. When in 671 BCE, only five years after the treaty, Ba’al betrayed the Assyrian king, Esarhaddon besieged Tyre, accusing the city of having an alliance with the Egyptian ruler Taharqa. The town was conquered and looted and the king of Tyre lost all of his cities. But Tyre itself was not annexed and its king was not deposed.

During Esarhaddon’s reign, the situation in the northwestern areas became unstable under increasing pressure from Musku and Tabalu. The territory of Meliddu, which belonged to the province of Kummuhu, was lost. The provinces of Que and Sam’alla may have come under pressure as well, when uprisings took place in Hīlakku, Kundu, and Sissû.

The most important intervention in the Levant during the reign of Esarhaddon’s successor Assurbanipal (668–631 BCE) occurred in the course of his “third campaign” against Ba’al of Tyre, which seems to have taken place between 663 and 657 BCE. After the military actions of 671 BCE, which ended with territorial losses for Tyre, Ba’al observed the treaty at least

until 667 BCE, at which point he is still listed among other loyal vassals. But, as in the past, his loyalty did not last for long. Warnings from the Assyrian king did not seem to have impressed him, so Assurbanipal was forced to take harsher measures. Only a siege of Tyre brought about Ba'al's submission: he handed his daughter, his nieces, and his son over to the Assyrian king along with heavy tribute. However, the city of Tyre was not annexed.

The last known Assyrian intervention in the Levant was a limited military operation in the 640s against Ušû (a city on the mainland opposite of Tyre) and Akkû, which took place on the march back from a campaign against Arabian tribes. The inhabitants of Ušû refused to continue to pay their annual tribute, as the inhabitants of Akkû probably did as well. In both cases, the insubordination was punished with executions and deportations. The corpses of the rebels of Akkû were impaled and put on exhibit around the town. The survivors were deported to Assyria and incorporated into the Assyrian army.

In spite of a relatively weak Assyrian presence in the Levant, it is remarkable how few uprisings occurred there between the late eighth century and the 640s. The situation in the Assyrian provinces was stable; they served, among other things, as bases for military operations against the Arabs, which took place partially on the land of the Transjordanian vassals, and – in the case of Moab – even with their support.

The Assyrian kings were met with a complicated geopolitical situation in the Levant. A look at the political map reveals that they dealt with the region in different ways. During the course of some 200 years, the Assyrian army campaigned in the Levant sixty-seven times. Although not every state lost its independence, twenty-one provinces were created there, based on the principle of “territorial continuity,” which meant that only provinces whose territories bordered on already existing ones were established. Three of them (Ḫilakku/Bit-Purutaš, Til-garimmu, and Ashdod) were lost shortly after they were created. Tabalu, some Phoenician cities (Arwad, Byblos, Samsimurruna, and Tyre), Philistia (Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, Ḫazzat), Judah, and the Transjordanian states (Ammon, Moab, and Edom), as well as some princedoms in Cyprus (Yadnana), remained Assyrian vassals.

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Further Reading

Bagg 2011: [chapters 4](#) and [5](#) provides a comprehensive study of the Assyrian conquest of (and rule in) the Levant based on the written sources (with secondary literature). For the historical geography of the Levant, see Bagg 2007 and Bagg 2011: [chapters 1](#) to [3](#). A history of the Aramaean states in the Levant can be found in Sader 1987 and Niehr 2014. Hawkins 1995 presents an assessment of the political geography of the northern Levant. For Shalmaneser's military campaigns, see Yamada 2000. For the relationship between Israel, Judah, and Assyria, see the commentary to the Book of Kings by Cogan and Tadmor 1988. Cogan 2008 offers a useful collection of cuneiform sources relating to ancient Israel. For Arabs in the Assyrian sources, see Eph'al 1984, and [Chapter 16](#) of this volume.

CHAPTER 14

Assyria and the Far West: The Aegean World

Robert Rollinger

In cuneiform sources of the eighth century BCE, there occurs for the first time an ethnic designation referring to people originating, from an Assyrian perspective, in the far west, i.e., in the Aegean. These people are labeled as “Yamnāya” (pronounced Yawnāya) in Assyrian and as “Yamanāya” (pronounced Yawanāya) in Babylonian. Very rarely, a corresponding toponym, Yaman (pronounced Yawan), is attested, referring vaguely to the region whence these people were coming (Rollinger 1997, 2001, 2003; for the Neo-Assyrian testimonies: Rollinger 2008a, 2011a).

During the last two decades, it has become increasingly clear that ethnicity is a highly dynamic and volatile social phenomenon (Hall 1997, 2002; McInerney 2001; Morgan 1991, 2001; Ulf 2009). Though it is evident that “Yam(a)nāya” is related etymologically to “Ionians,” the term can only be equated with the “Greeks” with caution. The origins of the term can be traced back as far as the Late Bronze Age, where we find related expressions in Egyptian and Ugaritic as well as in the Linear B texts of the Aegean (Rollinger 2007: 260–3; Dietrich 2000, 2007; Haider 2008). After a break of several hundred years, the “Ionians” appear for the first time in Greek texts. If Iliad 13.685 is a later interpolation, then the sixth century BCE (pseudo)Homeric hymn about Apollo must be regarded as the first attestation of the Ἰόνες (Homeric Hymns 3,147) (Rollinger 2007: 303–8). The problems in identifying the Yam(a)nāya with the Ionians derive from the fact that a continuity of the term should not be confused with a continuity of the “content” to which it refers. French “allemand” does not designate only Alemanns, and Finish Saksa not only Saxonians. English “Germans” means Germans of the barbarian migration as well as “modern” Germans, i.e. “Deutsche,” whereas the term Dutch, etymologically related to the latter, has become the English designation for the closest neighboring “Germans,” the inhabitants of the Netherlands. Denominations for “Greece” and “Greek” in modern Middle Eastern languages are all etymologically derived from the term “Ionian,” but Assyrian “Yamanāya,” Homeric “Iaones,” Turkish “Yunanlı,” Arabic “Yūnānī,” and Farsi “Yūnānī” certainly do not mean exactly the same thing (Rollinger 2011a).

Interpreting the Yamnāya of the eighth and seventh centuries BCE as a

specific Greek “tribe” with a uniform identity, language, and culture is also not without problems. The terminology for various groups of Greeks as we know it evolved from complex processes of ethnogenesis, which took place during the Persian Wars of the fifth century BCE (Ulf 1996b). Moreover, one should be aware that the Yam(a)nāya of the cuneiform sources betray an outsider’s perspective that was likely not identical with the inside perspective, shared by those who were labeled with this term. This Near Eastern perspective concerning the Yam(a)nāya was, moreover, not a stable one but was susceptible to changes and modifications according to time and place (for the post-Neo-Assyrian periods usage of the term, see Kuhrt 2002; Rollinger 2006a, 2006b, 2007).

All of these difficulties should be considered when we evaluate Assyrian references to the Yamnāya. The earliest come from the reign of the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BCE), the latest from the time close to the end of the Neo-Assyrian empire in the middle of the seventh century BCE (see the discussions in Lanfranchi 1999; Rollinger 2008a, 2008b; and cf. Rollinger 2001; Bagg 2007: 123f., 129). The sources can be divided into two groups. The majority of the attestations appear in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, which are composed in a literary dialect called Standard Babylonian and which are imbued with royal ideology. The most extensive attestations occur in the reign of Sargon II (721–705 BCE), but there are also examples from the inscriptions of Sennacherib (704–689 BCE) and Esarhaddon (688–669 BCE). Aside from royal inscriptions, the Yam(a)nāya are also mentioned in archival sources, which provide a different perspective. Two of these are letters pertaining to the royal administration (Nimrud Letter 69 = ND 2370 = Saggs 2001: 164–6 = SAA 19, 25, plus ND 2737 = Saggs 2001: 166–7 = SAA 19, 26). Both are related to a certain Qurdi-Aššur-lamur, who held an important position on the Levantine coast during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BCE) (cf. Van Buylaere 2002; Yamada 2008). The three remaining documents are from files of the Assyrian administration and belong to the reigns of Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE) or Ashurbanipal (668–627 BCE): SAA 7, 48, SAA 11, 1, and SAA 11, 34 (Rollinger 2008a).

The two letters are, so far, the earliest Assyrian attestations of the Yamnāya. Qurdi-Aššur-lamur seems to have been governor of the Assyrian province of Šimīrra, south of the estuary of the Orontes River. He was in control of the Syro-Phoenician coast, which had become part of the province after the subjugation of Tyre, Israel, and Damascus in 732 BCE (for the problems connected with the term “Phoenician” cf. van Dongen 2010). Beginning with the eighth century BCE, the Assyrians started to control the trading activities of the Levantine city-states by establishing trade centers (*kāru*, *būt-kāri*), where tax inspectors exacted taxes from the local population (Yamada 2008: 309). One of these “trade centers,” localized on the seashore, is mentioned in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, which summarize the king’s conquests

in Syria in 738 BCE (Stele II B 13': Tadmor 1994: 104f., plate XXXV; Rollinger 2011a: 270). The trade center is qualified as a "royal storehouse" (*bīt šabūtāte šarrūte*), supplying the Assyrian state with the revenue from trade and taxation related to the goods imported by local sea-faring traders, who may have been Syro-Phoenicians, Philistines, and Greeks (Yamada 2005: 68). In one of his letters (ND 2715), Qurdi-Aššur-lamur reports to the king that such "trading centers" (*bīt kārāni*) have been established in the territory of Tyre (Saggs 2001: 155–8, plate 31 = SAA 19, 22; Yamada 2005: 59; Yamada 2008: 301f.). They are also attested in Sidon and Gaza (Summary Inscription 9, rev. 16; Tadmor 1994: 188f. with n. 16; Yamada 2005: 69).

It cannot be doubted that these facilities greatly affected Assyrian connections to the west. In the last years, it has become clear that Levantine traders had already reached the westernmost end of the Mediterranean Sea at the beginning of the ninth century BCE, as radiocarbon dating samples from Huelva in Southern Spain have demonstrated (Nijboer and van der Pflicht 2006; González de Canales et al. 2006). When from the middle of the ninth century BCE onwards the city-states on the Phoenician coast began to fall under Assyrian supremacy, the Assyrians must have become increasingly interested in controlling these far-reaching contacts and their economic profits. In a treaty between Esarhaddon and Baal, the king of Tyre (SAA 2, 5), we gain some insight as to what extent the Assyrians confined the independence of dependent vassal rulers (Parpola and Watanabe 1988: 24–7). The treaty specifies which harbors Baal's ships were entitled to use and where his merchants were allowed to trade (SAA 2, 5, III 18'–30'). Thus, the Assyrian empire, at least indirectly, developed a Mediterranean perspective and had undoubtedly some influence in this geographic area (see also Radner 2004). Yet, it is astonishing to note that, with one possible exception, Assyrian texts do not mention "Greek" traders and trading activities, even though these must have existed, as demonstrated by the large amount of Aegean pottery excavated at sites on the Levantine coast, for example al-Mīnā'. This pottery, which originated mainly from Euboea, with a smaller proportion from the Cyclades and Rhodes, substantially increases in the eighth century BCE (Haider 1996; Rollinger 2001), and it is exactly in this period that the first Assyrian attestations of the Yamnāya occur. The earliest attestation belongs to Qurdi-Aššur-lamur's dossier (ND 2737) and may be dated between 748 and 734 BCE (edition: Saggs 2001: 166–7, plate 33 = SAA 19, 26; cf. Yamada 2008: 305f., 309; for ND 2370 see Yamada 2008: 310). The letter is only partially preserved. Qurdi-Aššur-lamur reports about two cities: the first city is ^{uru}ia-ú-na and the second may be read as ^{uru}S[A]G-šu-ri, i.e. Rēši-šūri (obv. line 14'–15') (cf. Na'aman 2004: 70). The city Iauna, i.e. Yawna, can be interpreted as "Yawnāya-city" (Rollinger 2011a: 271f.). If this is true, this letter provides the first attestation of a "Greek" settlement on Assyrian territory, and though we do not know where exactly it should be localized, it is highly probable that it was a coastal town. Since the events

reported in the letter take place in the south of the Gʿabal al-Aqraʿ, an identification with al-Mīnāʾ seems to be ruled out. Raʾs al-Bassīṭ is a possible option, even though this equation provides some problems too (Naʾaman 2004: 70).

A few additional cuneiform documents testify to the presence of “Greeks” within the Assyrian empire. One administrative text from Nineveh about silver payments in connection with the Queen Mother mentions, in a fragmentary context, one (or more?) Yamanāya (SAA 4, 48, line 6 = Fales and Postgate 1992: 56). We do not know this person’s function; it has been speculated that he might have been a deportee, but this remains pure speculation (Rollinger 2001). More information is gained from an undated Assyrian letter, originating from the reign of Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE) (SAA 16, 136). The text refers to fifteen people, qualified as fugitives, who were sent from the governor of the city of Der (east of Babylonia and the Tigris River) to two Assyrian officials. One of these people is called Addikrituš (ʾad-di-ik-ri-tú-šú; rev. 2), which is clearly a Greek name, Antikritos. He probably originated from Cyprus (Rollinger and Korenjak 2001) and was most likely a mercenary soldier.

In his annals, Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE) offers a list of ten Cypriot vassal kings, reproduced without modification by his son and successor Ashurbanipal (668–627 BCE). Some of these kings have Phoenician names (Qisu of Salamis; Damusu of Qart-hadasht) but some are clearly Greek (Akestor of Idalion; Philagoras of Chytroi; Eteanthros of Paphos; Aretos of Soloi; Damasos of Kourion; Admetos of Tamassos; Onasagoras of Ledra; Bouthytes of Marion). Besides the aforementioned Antikritos, these are the earliest attestations of Greek personal names in cuneiform sources (Lipiński 1991).

Through the lenses of Assyrian “official” texts, the Yamnāya are viewed as robbers and marauders. This already becomes evident in another letter of Qurdi-Aššur-lamur, written to the Assyrian king around 732/30 BCE (Nimrud Letter 69 = ND 2370) (Saggs 2001: 164–6, plate 32 = SAA 19, 25; Fales 1992: 52–4; Parker 2000; Yamada 2008: 310):

To the king my lord, your servant Qurdi-Aššur-lamur: The Yamnāya have appeared. They have battled at the city of Samsim[uruna], at the city of Ḫarišu, and at the city of [...]. A cavalryman came to the city of Da...[... (to report this to me). I gathered up the free men and went *away*. They (the Yamnāya) did not carry anything away. As soon as they saw my soldiers they [fled] on their boats. In the midst of the sea they [disappeared] ...

Obviously, the Yamnāya deliberately avoided a military confrontation with the Assyrian army. Their strength was their high mobility, which was based on their nautical abilities. They originated from “the midst of the sea,” whither they also return. This metaphor has a long history in Assyrian texts and in the

Assyrians' perceptions of the far west (Lang and Rollinger 2010). It does not primarily refer to specific islands but rather to a faraway region at the western fringes of the Assyrian empire. In the reign of Sargon II (721–705 BCE), these fringes formed a triangle between the Syro-Phoenician coast, Cyprus, and Cilicia (Que), and it was in this specific zone of encounter that the Assyrian king faced the threat posed by the Yamnāya (Fuchs 1993: 109, 319f.; cf. Rollinger 2001: 239f.; Rollinger 2003: 339):

[To subdue the Yamnāya, who] reside [in] the midst of the sea, who since faraway [days] were killing the inhabitants of Tyre and [the land of] Que, *disconnecting the ways (of trade)*, I embarked [on ships of the land of] Ḫatti (= Syria west of the Euphrates) (and moved) towards them out on the sea. (There) I crushed all (of them) with my weapon.

(“Annals,” lines 117–19)

In other texts, Sargon boasts that he caught the Yamnāya in the midst of the sea “like fish,” which once again refers to the abovementioned zone of encounter between the Assyrians and these westerners (Rollinger 2008a).

For quite some time, the Yamnāyas' homelands remained beyond the perspective of the Assyrian sources. This changed in the time of Esarhaddon, when the Assyrians' view of the west expanded considerably. The most important testimony for this development is a passage in one of Esarhaddon's royal inscriptions (RINAP 4: 60, line 9–11 = AsBbE 9–11): “I wrote to all of the kings who are in the midst of the sea, from Yadanana (Cyprus) (and) Yawan to Tarsisi, (and) they bowed down at my feet.”

A thorough analysis of the passage clearly reveals the advanced geographical knowledge of the reign of Esarhaddon (cf. Rollinger 2008b, 2011a; Lang and Rollinger 2010). On the one hand, the passage refers to the already well-established fact that the Yamnāya originate from the midst of the sea, i.e. the faraway west. On the other hand, the traditional zone of encounter with them is no longer the westernmost region, according to Assyrian perspective. The *nisbe* Yawnāya has been replaced by the toponym Yawan, i.e. their place of origin, and in this context the Assyrian king refers for the first time to political entities, i.e. kings, who are expected to respect Assyrian supremacy. Yet, the Assyrians' perspective does not stop at Yawan, i.e. the Aegean, but goes far beyond, as far as the western end of the Mediterranean Sea. It is absolutely clear that Tarsisi does not refer to the city of Tarsus both because of the ideological message of the text and also for linguistic reasons. Tarsus appears in Assyrian texts as Tarzu, whereas *Tarsisi* has to be realized phonetically as *Taršiši*. It is connected with the Biblical Tarshish and the Tartessos of the classical sources, thus pointing to a region somewhere in southern Spain.¹ Of course, Esarhaddon's claim to have subdued “all the kings” of the Mediterranean is not a historical fact but an ideologically motivated assertion. It must be viewed within the framework of Assyrian royal ideology, in which

every Assyrian king is eager to demonstrate that he has surpassed the achievements of his predecessors. Yet, seen in the light of the Assyrian control of the Levantine cities through taxing their trade activities in the west, the king's claim is not only a castle in the air. We may suppose that the Assyrian administration was well informed about the trading activities of these cities, including basic data concerning where these cities had established emporia in the far west. This is supported by the king's assertion that he had been writing to all these foreign kings,² even though this claim has an ideological ring to it too. But it is clear that shortly afterwards, Ashurbanipal did communicate with Gyges of Lydia, another king of the far west (Fuchs 2010).

As discussed above, the Assyrians conceptualized their contacts with the Yamnāya mainly as confrontations with marauders and bandits who were heroically pushed back by the Assyrian kings. But this perspective is due to the Assyrian royal ideology and it is clear that, in reality, contacts must have been much more diverse. The importance of commercial connections has already been underlined, but there is more, and again it is in the royal inscriptions that we find essential information.

In one of his inscriptions, Sennacherib (704–681 BCE) focuses on the events of his sixth campaign (694 BCE). He reports how he ordered a fleet to be built from scratch and how the ships and their crews were shipped down the Tigris River as far as the city of Opis, where the whole fleet was transported across the land to the Euphrates River in order to reach the Persian Gulf, where the king campaigned against Elam. The crews of these ships are of interest (T 29 [Bull 4]; Luckenbill 1924: 73 = RINAP 3/2: 82–3; Salonen 1939: 181 (col I, lines 11–16); Frahm 1997: 117; cf. Rollinger 2001: 242f., 2003: 339f., 2008a, 2008b):

“Hittites,” plunder of my bows, I settled in Nineveh, and they built dexterously mighty ships according to the workmanship of their land. I gave orders to sailors – Tyrians, Sidonians, and Ya[m]nāya, captives of my hand, and (my troops) let them sail down with them the Tigris River to the city of Opis.

The text not only relates the establishment of a fleet in the dockyards of Nineveh but also offers information about the working gangs and the recruitment of the sailors. The workers are generally classified as “Hittites,” i.e. Syrians west of the river Euphrates. The mariners, in contrast, are mentioned with specific references to their places of origin. They are labeled as Tyrians, Sidonians, and Yamnāya. At first glance, it seems very clear how these men were hired, since Sennacherib qualifies them as prisoners of war. Yet one may doubt whether that was really the case. The workers, as well as a considerable part of the crews of these ships, should be regarded as true specialists, and one wonders whether the Assyrian king had really been able

to deport them as captives. It seems more likely that a considerable part of these people had been recruited on the “free market.” Comparable measures have been undertaken throughout time; they are, for example, well attested for Alexander the Great (Rollinger 2008c). Yet, it seems that such a procedure did not fit into the requirements of Assyrian royal ideology, in which the king had to demonstrate his ability to supervise and control the resources of the world. Sidon and Tyre were indeed under Assyrian control, but where did Sennacherib’s Yamnāya come from? We can only speculate about their origin, though the aforementioned trade centers as well as Yawan-city come to mind. In any case, Assyria was an important market for such specialists, and this is certainly not only true for mariners and ship-builders.

The evidence so far adduced touches upon the question of the Yamnāyas’ activities as mercenary soldiers in the Assyrian army. Concerning the Neo-Babylonian period, we have the famous example of Antimenidas, the brother of Alcaeus. But what about earlier times? Quite recently, it has been demonstrated convincingly that we indeed have to reckon with Aegean mercenaries in the Assyrian army (Luraghi 2006). The Aegean world as an area at the fringes of an empire fits, from a comparative perspective, very well into what we know about recruitment areas for mercenaries throughout world history. Going abroad was a response to structural poverty, not an elite phenomenon. Though there is no direct evidence for Aegean mercenaries in Assyrian texts, as we have already seen, there are some important archaeological findings pointing in this direction. A horse frontlet from the sanctuary of Samos with an Aramaic inscription referring to king Hazael of Damascus (second half of the ninth century BCE) and two blinkers from the sanctuary of Apollo at Eretria in Euboea with the same inscription can, with a high degree of probability, be interpreted as dedications made by mercenaries who may have come into possession of these items after the sack of Damascus in 732 BCE. Other blinkers and frontlets from Samos and Miletus, as well as Assyrian horse-trappings, may point in the same direction (Luraghi 2006: 38–41). The most relevant piece in this respect is a Phoenician silver bowl from a chamber tomb near the Cypriot city of Amathus (Markoe 1985: 172–4, 248f. plates). The piece dates from around 700 BCE and shows, among other things, an army attacking the walls of a Near Eastern city from two sides. While the soldiers on the left are modeled according to Assyrian style, those on the right are four Greek hoplites in close formation. This is not only the earliest depiction of a hoplite phalanx, but also displays Aegean soldiers as part of an Assyrian army (Luraghi 2006, 26f.). All of this refers to a “proto-history” of Greek mercenary soldiers in the Eastern Mediterranean that may already have started in the ninth century BCE. In the middle of the seventh century BCE, this institution seems to have developed substantially due to King Psammetich’s concerted efforts to recruit Greek and Carian mercenaries. In Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon, more than 2000 Carians are attested, and the Persians seem to have adopted similar recruitment strategies after the

conquest of Egypt in 525 BCE, at the latest (Rollinger 2008c).

There is some disagreement concerning the extent to which Greek weaponry was influenced by Assyrian archetypes (Luraghi 2006: 28: positive; Raaflaub 2010: negative). In any case, it is clear that Aegean mercenaries, besides traders, pirates, and (probably) wandering priests (Huber 2005), played a major role in intercultural contacts between the east and the west. Though there is still heavy debate regarding how dependent socio-political institutions like the Greek polis are on Near Eastern predecessors (Raaflaub 2004, 2011), important elements of treaty-making and accompanying rituals have clearly been adapted from the Assyrian model (Rollinger 2004). This is not only true for petty kings in the Levant and in Anatolia (cf. RINAP 4: 2, I 43–6; 3, II 1'–3'; 35, rev. 5'; see also Lanfranchi 2005, 2011), but also for the inhabitants of the Aegean. The entire Orientalizing Revolution was triggered by these contacts, and the impact of ancient Near Eastern literary models on Homer and Hesiod was substantial (Rollinger 1996, 2012; West 1997; Burkert 2004; Patzek 2011). All of this would not have been possible without the manifold intercultural contacts and the stimulating and powerful influence the Assyrian empire had on its westernmost neighbors (Rollinger 2011b; on the routes of contact see most recently Wiesehöfer 2011).

Abbreviations

CAD

= *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*, Chicago Oriental Institute 1956–2010.

ND

= Sigla of the texts from Nimrud.

RINAP 3/2

= Grayson and Novotny 2014.

RINAP 4

= Leichty 2011.

SAA 2

= Parpola and Watanabe 1988.

SAA 7

= Fales and Postgate 1992.

SAA 11

= Fales and Postgate 1995.

SAA 16

= Luukko and Van Buylaere 2002.

SAA 19

= Luukko 2012.

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Further Reading

The most comprehensive treatment and discussion of the Neo-Assyrian sources on the Aegean West is Rollinger 2008a. On the Assyrian impact on regions as far west as the Strait of Gibraltar and the ideological dimensions of these contacts, see Rollinger 2008b, and now in detail Rollinger 2013; see also Lanfranchi 1999, 2005, 2011. The archaeological dimensions of Assyrian and ancient Near Eastern influence on the West are discussed by Rehm and Braun-Holzinger 2005.

Notes

- 1 It is a pity that the new edition of the text by Leichty 2011: 135 again translates Tarsisi as Tarsus, without referring to the problem at all.
- 2 In this respect I follow the translation of Leichty 2011: 135 who takes *ašpur* (l. 9') as referring to line 10', whereas Borger 1956: 86 interprets the phrase *abēl ašpur* as hendiadys: "... nahm ich in Besitz und beherrschte ich." Leichty's translation fits the ideological context of the passage much better.

CHAPTER 15

Assyria and the South: Babylonia

Eckart Frahm

Introduction

Assyria's relationship with Babylonia was a special one, similar to the relationship that Rome had with Greece. Like siblings, the two civilizations had much in common, but the many features they shared made their differences only more pronounced, which led on occasion to particularly charged conflicts between them.

Assyria and Babylonia were neighbors, connected by the Tigris river, but they had different ecological settings. Assyria's core area was a hilly landscape that received sufficient precipitation to allow rain-fed agriculture. Babylonia, in contrast, formed a large alluvial plain where lack of rainfall necessitated an agriculture based on artificial irrigation.

Culturally, the two civilizations were closely related. For much of their history, they used varieties of the same language: the Assyrian dialect of Akkadian was spoken in the north, the Babylonian dialect of Akkadian in the south. Assyrian cuneiform writing was based on southern models, even though the exact sign forms differed. Over time, many originally southern deities found their way into the Assyrian pantheon, and religious practices and institutions from Babylonia were eagerly adopted by Assyria's theological and cultural elites, as were Babylonian literature and scholarship. Yet there were also some pronounced differences. Most importantly, Assyria's main god, Assur, whose cult remained throughout the ages a cornerstone of a distinct Assyrian identity, was never truly worshipped in the south (for a very late exception, see Beaulieu 1997). The Assyrian king's role as "deputy" and chief priest of Assur was peculiar as well – Babylonian rulers did not have a similarly intimate relationship with Marduk of Babylon (Maul 1999: 212–14). And some of the most essential features of Assyrian art, such as monumental bull colossi and bas-reliefs on orthostats, did not have Babylonian counterparts either.

From early on, Assyria had close political and economic ties with Babylonia. Like Rome, it eventually morphed into an empire that exercised political domination over its culturally more advanced sister civilization. In the end, however, Babylonian armies helped destroy the Assyrian state, and Babylonia became the beneficiary of the first *translatio imperii* that followed Assyria's

demise.

This chapter seeks to describe and analyze the relations between Assyria and Babylonia as they unfolded over time. Needless to say, only a very rough outline can be provided. Readers interested in more detailed discussions of the matters briefly covered here should consult the historical chapters of this book, as well as those on Assyrian art, religion, and scholarship.

The Third and Second Millennium BCE

Like all of Upper Mesopotamia, the “Assyrian triangle,” demarcated in historical times by the cities Ashur, Nineveh, and Arbela, experienced a phase of pronounced regionalization and ruralization during the first centuries of the third millennium BCE,¹ with little evidence for economic, cultural, or political interaction with the south (see [Chapter 2](#)). From ca. 2700 onwards, however, there are indications of a growing urbanization in the region, and southern influences began to play a more significant role. It is important to stress that no such thing as a cohesive “Assyria” existed at this time and that cities like Ashur and Nineveh were not yet part of the same political sphere.

Since no texts dating to the Early Dynastic period have been found in the Middle Tigris region and texts from the south are largely silent on the situation in the north, our knowledge about the north during the mid-third millennium (when numerous city-states flourished in Babylonia and the Khabur region) remains sparse. The available written sources from Babylonia include the Early Dynastic List of Geographical Names, which may mention the city of Ashur (see Frayne 1992, 42), and a recently published stone plaque from Kiš(?) probably dating to the period between 2750 and 2600 BCE (Steinkeller 2013). It refers to 6300 prisoners brought to the south from “Šubur/Subartu,” a term designating the geographic area later associated with Assyria. This is the earliest attestation of Subartu available so far. Apparently, the region was at least for a while ruled by the southern state of Kiš. The only clues we have from Assyria itself come from a number of non-inscribed objects. Of particular interest are the Early Dynastic votive statues discovered in the temples of Assur and Ištar in Ashur. They display striking similarities with comparable statues from Mari and the Diyala region and were apparently inspired by southern models (Bär 2010).

Between 2350 BCE and 2200 BCE, the rulers of the dynasty of Akkad conquered large portions of Western Asia, including the area along the Middle Tigris. From this period date the earliest texts so far discovered in Ashur. They comprise a few votive inscriptions, one of them (RIMA 1, p. 8) mentioning the Akkad king Maništušu, as well as some mostly unpublished school texts and economic documents (see, provisionally, Neumann 1997).

The texts demonstrate that the Old Akkadian state had some impact on the Middle Tigris region, both politically and culturally, but the extent of its influence remains unclear. A case in point is a reference in a royal inscription from the reign of Šamši-Adad I (ca. 1808–1776) to construction work allegedly performed by Maništušu on the temple of Ištar in Nineveh. Since contemporary evidence for such activities is essentially absent, J.G. Westenholz (2004) has argued that Šamši-Adad's account of Maništušu's efforts could be a complete fabrication, devised to imbue the temple with additional prestige.

Nineveh was under strong Hurrian influence towards the end of the third millennium. The city's principal goddess was known under the Hurrian name Šauš(k)a, and in the mid-21st century, a Hurrian named Tiš-atal served as its ruler. By this time, Nineveh was a formally independent principality that cultivated close religious and diplomatic ties with the kings of the Third Dynasty of Ur, who in 2110 BCE had founded a new powerful state in the south. Šauš(k)a of Nineveh is mentioned in offering lists from Drehem, an important administrative center of the Ur III state, and Tiš-atal is known to have visited the southern city of Nippur to express his loyalty to the Ur III king Šu-Sîn (Steinkeller 2007).

As for Ashur, scholars assumed for a long time that it had been more closely drawn into Ur's sphere of influence than Nineveh. Recently, however, the idea that Ashur was administered by a governor appointed by the kings of Ur, and not by a local leader, has been put into question, even though there is no doubt that the city, under the rule of a certain Zarriqum, acknowledged to some extent Ur's hegemony (Michalowski 2009).

Ashur gained complete political independence shortly after 2025 BCE, when the Ur III state entered a political crisis leading to its eventual collapse. For some 200 years, a local dynasty founded by a certain Puzur-Aššur ruled over Ashur, initiating what we now call the Old Assyrian period (see [Chapters 3 and 4](#)). It is noteworthy that the members of the Puzur-Aššur dynasty never used the title “king” (*šarrum*), which was instead exclusively reserved for the god Assur. This “theocratic” conception of power has parallels further south – during the early Old Babylonian period, very similar political-theological models were in place in Ešnunna in the Diyala region (Charpin 2004: 64–5, 233).

Thanks to some 25,000 documents from the city of Kaniš in central Anatolia, we are well informed about Ashur's commercial and political relations with the north during the earlier phase of the Old Assyrian period. From Ashur itself, however, we have only a very small number of texts from this time and hence know little about the city's interactions with the Babylonian south. The few available sources present a somewhat contradictory picture. On one hand, a famous passage in an inscription of the early Old Assyrian ruler Ilušuma (RIMA 1, p. 18) claims that the latter had “established the ‘freedom’

(*addurārum*) of the Akkadians and their children” throughout Babylonia. The exact meaning of this statement remains debated, but Veenhof is certainly right when he argues that it rather refers to Assyrian attempts to facilitate trade with the south than some kind of Assyrian domination over the region (Veenhof 2008: 96–8, 126–7). We know, in fact, that Old Assyrian merchants imported textiles from Babylonia and sold them in the north. On the other hand, a verdict by Ashur’s influential City Assembly barred Assyrian traders from selling gold “to any Akkadian (i.e., Babylonian), Amorite, or Subarean,” and there are indications that Ashur’s merchants sought to stifle attempts by Babylonian traders to compete with them in Anatolia (Veenhof 2008: 58–9, 97).

The rulers of the Puzur-Aššur dynasty put a certain stress on their identity as Assyrians. Their royal inscriptions were written in the Old Assyrian dialect and not in Babylonian, and even though a few Babylonian gods and goddesses are mentioned in sources from this time (Veenhof 2008, 103–4), the deities whose temples were particularly important – Assur, Ištar, and Adad – did not have particularly close links with the south. In one respect, however, the south did provide a model – the Akkad period, a turning point of Babylonian history, exerted a strong fascination on the Old Assyrian rulers. Two members of the Puzur-Aššur dynasty, Sargon and Naram-Sîn, adopted names of famous Akkad kings, and a literary text from Kaniš, written in Old Assyrian language, celebrates the deeds of Sargon of Akkad (Dercksen 2005).

It was, however, not until Šamši-Adad I conquered Ashur in 1808 BCE that the city experienced a more noticeable “Babylonization.” Šamši-Adad was an Amorite, but one who was deeply steeped in Babylonian culture. He left a number of Babylonian inscriptions in Ashur and, most importantly, introduced the idea of a close connection between the Assyrian chief god Assur and Enlil of Nippur, the traditional head of the Babylonian pantheon. This is apparent from the fact that the new Assur temple built by Šamši-Adad was also dedicated to Enlil (Galter 1986; Miglus 2001). Ashur, however, did not become Šamši-Adad’s main residence city, and the new ruler, who controlled large portions of Upper Mesopotamia, did not consider himself a “king of Assyria.” In fact, Assyria as a political entity still did not exist during this time (Charpin and Durand 1997).

At some point, Šamši-Adad put his son Išme-Dagan I in charge of Ekallatum and the nearby city of Ashur. After his father’s death in 1776 BCE, Išme-Dagan faced a highly volatile political situation that forced him on at least three occasions to take refuge in Babylonia. The new Mesopotamian strongman was Hammurapi of Babylon, who claims in the prologue to his famous law collection that, among other pious deeds, he “returned to Ashur its benevolent spirit” (iv 53–8). But apparently, Hammurapi did not seek to rule Ashur directly. Išme-Dagan managed to somehow stay in power there, trying to maintain the religious politics implemented by his father. A historical-

literary text known from seventh century BCE manuscripts from Ashur and Nineveh includes a dialogue in which the god Enlil-Assur expresses to Išme-Dagan his displeasure about interruptions of his cult (KAL 3, no. 76).

The repeated political unrest notwithstanding, Ashur carried on its commercial relations with the south throughout much of the 18th century. Babylonian documents dating to the reign of Hammurapi's successor Samsuiluna indicate that Assyrian traders went to Sippar and even lived there during this time (Veenhof 1991).

After 1700 BCE, Ashur and the territories further north entered a dark age, and for several centuries little is known about their relations with the south (see [Chapter 5](#)). A reference to a slave owner from Ashur in a sales document from northern Babylonia dated to 1641 BCE (YOS 13, 35) is a rare exception. The most important political development of this period was the rise of the Mittani state, which dominated for a time much of Upper Mesopotamia and exposed the Assyrian territory to strong Hurrian influence. Nonetheless, a dynasty of formally independent Assyrian rulers, founded towards the end of the 18th century by a certain Adasi, managed to stay in power in Ashur.

At least some of the early members of the Adasi dynasty seem to have been able to conduct diplomatic business with the south. If we are to believe an entry in the Synchronistic History (Grayson 1975: 158–9, i 5'–7'), Puzur-Aššur III, who reigned at the turn from the 16th to the 15th century, had enough political clout to sign a treaty with the Kassite king Burnaburiaš I that fixed the boundary between the territory of Ashur and Babylonia. Very slowly, it seems, and not without setbacks, Ashur began to morph into a territorial state, Assyria, that became increasingly capable of handling its affairs on its own (Llop 2012). This development reached a first peak under Aššur-uballiṭ I (1353–1318), when Assyria joined Egypt, Babylonia, the Mittani state, and Ḫatti as a new member of the small and exclusive 14th century “Club of the Great Powers” that controlled international relations in Western Asia. Aššur-uballiṭ wrote at least two letters to the Egyptian pharaoh and assumed the royal title *šarru*.

The Kassite rulers of Babylonia were dismayed by Assyria's rise but unable to reverse it. Burnaburiaš II, who had married a daughter of Aššur-uballiṭ by the name of Muballiṭat-Šerua and apparently believed this gave him certain rights over his northern neighbor, sought to convince the Egyptians not to initiate direct commercial relations with Assyria (Moran 1992: 18), but to no avail. Assyria's new power came into even sharper relief after the Kassite military instigated a coup against Burnaburiaš's successor, who was a son of Muballiṭat-Šerua. Aššur-uballiṭ, turning the tables, defeated the usurpers and helped another son of Burnaburiaš onto the throne. Such interventions became quite common from now on. Depending on who had the upper hand in military terms, Assyrian kings sought to influence politics in Babylonia and Babylonian kings in Assyria (see [Chapter 6](#) and Fuchs 2011: 244–60), each

side apparently convinced that the close relations that existed between them entitled it to interfere in the affairs of the other.

Culturally, the influence was for the most part rather one-sided. Perhaps in order to suppress the traces impressed on Assyria by centuries of Hurrian domination, Assyrian kings began to endorse again with great enthusiasm religious and cultural concepts rooted in Babylonia. During the reign of Aššur-uballit I, a Babylonian scholar by the name of Marduk-nadin-aḫḫe, who hailed from an important Babylonian family of administrators and scribes, assumed the office of “royal scribe.” He lived in a house in Ashur located in close proximity to a “Gate of Marduk,” which in all likelihood belonged to a Marduk temple founded by Aššur-uballit (Wiggerman 2008). The city god of Babylon and his son Nabû rose to great prominence in Assyria during this time, as shown by numerous Middle Assyrian personal names that include their names as theophoric elements.

Despite Assyria’s endorsement of key elements of Babylonian culture and continuing trade relations with the south (Faist 2001: 207–12), political tensions with Babylonia did not ease. Border skirmishes between the two countries occurred under Enlil-nirari (1317–1308) and Adad-nirari I (1295–1264). The situation escalated during the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233–1197). Claiming that his Babylonian opponent Kaštiliaš had violated an earlier Assyro-Babylonian treaty, Tukulti-Ninurta sent his armies against Babylonia, conquered the city of Babylon, and assumed the Babylonian title “King of Sumer and Akkad,” a move that indicates the special status accorded to Babylonia by Assyria’s political elite (Kravitz 2010; Llop 2011). The Assyrian king celebrated his victory in a long epic written in Babylonian language and replete with tropes from Babylonian literary texts (Machinist 1978; Foster 2005: 298–317), and commissioned a Sumero-Akkadian poem to praise his deeds (Foster 2005: 318–23).

To some extent, Tukulti-Ninurta’s scribes may have owed their knowledge of Babylonian scholarship and literature, which they deployed so skillfully in the aforementioned works, to an act of “booknapping” undertaken during the king’s Babylonian campaigns. According to the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic, Assyrian troops returned from the south with numerous clay tablets inscribed with religious and scholarly texts. Many of the Middle Babylonian tablets found in Ashur may have been part of this booty (see [Chapter 20](#)). According to later sources, the Assyrians also brought the statue of Marduk to Assyria. A Middle Assyrian cultic text found in Ashur (Köcher 1952) provides instructions for a ritual celebrated in honor of Marduk, but it is unclear whether the ceremony described took place in Ashur or Babylon. Middle Assyrian administrative texts reveal that significant numbers of Kassite deportees had to work on royal building projects in Assyria.

Direct Assyrian rule over Babylonia proved to be short-lived, and for much of the 12th century, Babylonia gained again the upper hand (see, *inter alia*, Bloch

2012). As part of the power play between the two states, Babylonian and Assyrian kings seem to have exchanged numerous letters during this time. A few of them, perhaps in reedited versions, entered Assyria's scribal "stream of tradition," as indicated by copies found in Assurbanipal's libraries in Nineveh (see, e.g., Llop and George 2001/2002). Given that the Babylonian correspondents call certain Assyrian kings drunkards and claim that Assyrian men were like women, the prolonged study of this letter corpus by Assyria's intellectual elites is a rather remarkable phenomenon.

Roughly a century after Tukulti-Ninurta's war against Babylonia, in the 20th and 21st regnal years of Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076), Assyrian troops moved again into the Babylonian heartland, but were forced to retreat almost immediately to ward off attacks on their homeland by Aramaic tribal groups. Two of Tiglath-pileser's sons were killed in connection with this war, under circumstances that remain unclear (Llop 2003).

The Synchronistic History claims that in 1069 BCE, Aššur-bel-kala (1073–1056) put Adad-apla-iddina on the Babylonian throne and married one of his daughters, initiating a period in which "the peoples of Assyria and Karduniaš (i.e., Babylonia) were joined together" (Grayson 1975: 165, ii 25'–37'). By this time, both Assyria and Babylonia were equally affected by the onslaught of the aforementioned Aramaeans, who had begun to infiltrate Mesopotamia in the wake of the ecological and political breakdown that marked the end of the Late Bronze Age. The newly formed alliance between Assyria and Babylonia may have been inspired by a desire on the part of both sides to keep the Aramaean intruders at bay (Fuchs 2011: 260–2).

The First Millennium BCE

Both Assyria and the kingdom of Babylon found themselves reduced to their core areas during the crisis years at the turn of the millennium. Apparently, Babylon managed to keep its possessions in the northeast, but elsewhere, the regions formerly ruled by it turned into a motley hodgepodge of political actors. Semi-nomadic Aramaeans roamed the countryside and disrupted attempts to engage in transregional exchange. Aramaean sub-groups known as Chaldaeans founded a number of proto-states in the Mesopotamian south, including Bit-Yakin (lit. "House of Yakin"), Bit-Dakkuri, and Bit-Amukani (Berlejung and Streck 2013). Ancient cities such as Babylon, Uruk, and Nippur remained largely autonomous but were politically weak, even though they managed to maintain much of their ancient cultural and religious prestige.

Assyria recovered from the crisis more quickly. At the beginning of the reign of Adad-nirari II (911–891), Assyrian armies, penetrating regions previously

under Babylonian control, managed to seize the important city of Arrapha, which became a new base for Assyrian operations in the east and south. Towards the end of the king's reign, a formal treaty between Assyria and Babylonia confirmed the newly drawn border separating the two states in the eastern Tigris region. Inscriptions of several ninth century Assyrian kings mention the border's main sectors (Fuchs 2011: 263–4).

When Shalmaneser III (858–824) ascended the Assyrian throne, he not only renewed the border treaty with Babylonia but reached a kind of “*entente cordiale*” with his Babylonian counterpart, King Nabû-aplu-iddina. In 851–50 BCE, after the latter had died and his son and legitimate heir, Marduk-zakir-šumi, found himself embroiled in a civil war with one of his own brothers, Shalmaneser intervened and helped Marduk-zakir-šumi secure the Babylonian throne. The Assyrian king visited the sanctuaries of various Babylonian deities, including Marduk, and supported Babylon militarily by fighting against the Chaldaean state of Bit-Dakkuri in the south. A bas-relief on a throne-base from Kalḫu depicts Shalmaneser in the act of shaking hands with Marduk-zakir-šumi, a unique motif that highlights the special relationship that existed between Assyria and Babylonia (Miglus 2000).

For a short while, during the unrest that broke out in Assyria in 826 BCE, two years before Shalmaneser's death, Babylonia gained again the upper hand. After helping one of Shalmaneser's sons, Šamši-Adad V (823–811), on the Assyrian throne, Marduk-zakir-šumi and the new Assyrian king signed a treaty (the only one between the two countries that has actually survived) whose stipulations clearly favored Babylonia (SAA 2, no. 1). But the advantage was short-lived, and in a series of campaigns undertaken between 815 and 811, Šamši-Adad reestablished Assyrian predominance. He annexed significant portions of the Babylonian territory in the eastern Tigris region, made incursions into Chaldaean lands in the south, and even conquered the city of Babylon (Fuchs 2011: 269–77). Babylon was left for a while without a king, and when the city eventually made a political comeback, it was under rulers belonging to the Chaldaean “tribes” of the south.

Šamši-Adad's heir, Adad-nirari III (810–783), confirmed the redrawing of the borders with Babylonia through another treaty. He also commissioned the so-called “Synchronistic History,” which sketches Assyro-Babylonian relations between the 15th and eighth century BCE from a markedly pro-Assyrian viewpoint, probably in an attempt to justify the recent territorial gains Assyria had made (Galter 1999). Copies of this text are known from Assurbanipal's libraries in Nineveh, testifying to the continuing interest it held for the Assyrian elites.

The Assyrian ability to intervene in Babylonia became increasingly limited during the reigns of Adad-nirari III and his immediate successors, all of whom were forced to share their power with a number of influential high officials. For several decades, Assyria had to focus its military attention on other

regions, especially Urartu, and besides skirmishes with Aramaean semi-nomads in the Assyro-Babylonian border area, little Assyrian activity in the south is recorded.

All this changed with the accession of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727), when Assyro-Babylonian relations entered an entirely new phase. For more than a century, until the collapse of the Assyrian state in 612/609 BCE, the political and cultural interaction with its southern neighbor became a central concern for Assyria's rulers (see Frame 2008), and large numbers of sources are available to shed light on it. The following paragraphs provide only a very bare outline of the political history of this period; more detailed information can be found in [Chapter 8](#).

The reign of Tiglath-pileser's marked the beginning of a new imperial age for Assyria. During his first fifteen years on the throne, the king's ambitions were primarily focused on Syria and the Levant, where several previously independent states were fully or partially annexed. But in 729, Tiglath-pileser turned his attention to Babylonia. After defeating Mukin-zeri, a Chaldaean from Bit-Amukani who had usurped the Babylonian throne two years earlier, he conquered the city of Babylon and assumed the title "king of Sumer and Akkad," the first Assyrian king to do so after Tukulti-Ninurta I. Through his two-time participation in the Akitu festival in Babylon, Tiglath-pileser showed his respect for Marduk and other Babylonian deities (Brinkman 1984: 39–44).

For a few years, the situation in Babylonia remained stable. But when Sargon II's accession to the Assyrian throne in 722 BCE met with substantial internal opposition, another Chaldaean leader, Marduk-aplu-iddina of Bit-Yakin, exploited the unrest by ousting the Assyrians and assuming the kingship of Babylon himself. For many years, he would play the role of public enemy number one for the Assyrian rulers (Brinkman 1964). Even the Bible (which calls him Merodach-baladan) mentions him, claiming that he sought to win Hezekiah, another late eighth century opponent of Assyrian hegemony, as an ally (2 Kings 20:12; Isa. 39:1).

Marduk-aplu-iddina's first term as Babylonian king came to an end in 710, when he was forced to flee after Sargon had finally managed to reconquer Babylonia. Sargon claims in his inscriptions that the citizens of Babylon received him with great enthusiasm, a statement whose truth is hard to gauge. In contrast, Sargon's own passion for everything Babylonian is beyond question. The Assyrian king stayed in Babylon for three years, participated in the Akitu festival, granted Babylon tax exemptions of a kind that otherwise only very few cities received, and attributed his kingship not only to Assur but also to Marduk (Vera Chamaza 2002: 43–70). He also revived the tradition, already sporadically attested for the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I, of writing the name Assur "An-šár," thereby implicitly identifying the Assyrian state god with a Babylonian deity prominently featured as an early leader of the gods in *Enūma eliš*, the Babylonian epic of creation (Frahm 1997: 282–3). Other

elements of Babylonian religion, including prayers and lamentations written in the Sumerian Emesal dialect, were adopted by Assyria's clerical elite as well (Gabbay 2014).

After conquering substantial portions of the Mesopotamian south, Sargon established a new administrative structure for Babylonia by dividing it into two provinces, both ruled by Assyrian governors: Babylon in the north and Gambulu in the south. Sargon also appointed new leaders in a number of important cities and temples. Not only Babylon, but other cult centers as well received tax relief and additional privileges, including relief from corvée work, probably in an attempt to ramp up the support of the cities against the Chaldaeans and Aramaeans in the rural hinterland (Brinkman 1984: 50–4).

In 705 BCE, Sargon was killed on the battlefield in Tabal. As indicated by a text most likely dating to the reign of Esarhaddon (SAA 3, no. 33), at least some members of the Assyrian elite regarded the king's inauspicious death as a divine punishment for his apparent preference of Babylonian over Assyrian gods (Frahm 1997: 227–9). This, among other things, may explain why Sargon's successor Sennacherib (704–681) treated Babylonia far less favorably than his father (Brinkman 1973). At the beginning of his reign, the indefatigable Marduk-aplu-iddina had again seized the crown in Babylon. Sennacherib eventually managed to drive him away, after Assyrian troops had waged war in various regions in Babylonia between 704 and 702 BCE, but unlike his father, he did not claim the Babylonian throne for himself. Instead, having set the tone by plundering Babylon's royal palace, he installed as king of Babylon a certain Bel-ibni, a member of an influential old family from Babylon who had grown up as a hostage at the Assyrian court.

Apparently, Bel-ibni never managed to gain full control over his realm. In 700 Sennacherib replaced him with his own eldest son, Aššur-nadin-šumi, and forced Marduk-aplu-iddina, who had continued his insurrectional activities, into his last exile in Elam. Again, though, Assyrian rule over Babylonia proved to be short-lived. In 694, the leading circles of Babylon removed Aššur-nadin-šumi from office and extradited him to the Elamites, who probably killed him.

Realizing that all his political experiments to govern Babylonia had failed, and deeply aggrieved about the last act of treason the Babylonians had committed, Sennacherib sought to take bloody revenge. In 691, Assyrian troops fought a pitched battle in the Assyro-Babylonian border region with the new Babylonian king, Mušeziḫ-Marduk, and his numerous allies, among them Persians and Elamites. Even though it resulted not in an Assyrian victory but a draw, Sennacherib's annals describe the battle with great rhetorical fanfare and in a poetic language that seems to be influenced by *Enūma eliš* and the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic, thus paving the way, ideologically, for Sennacherib's final attack on Babylon (Weissert 1997; Frahm 2014: 208–13). In 689, Assyrian troops conquered the city, ransacked it thoroughly, and destroyed (or

removed?) the image of the Babylonian god Marduk.

Sennacherib's efforts to annihilate Babylon were accompanied, somewhat ironically, by an attempt on his part to make Assyrian religion and culture more Babylonian than ever before. The sacred infrastructure of Ashur was refashioned after the model of Babylon, which Assyria's religious center was apparently meant to replace. Assyrian scribes created a new edition of *Enūma eliš*, whose protagonist was the Assyrian god Assur instead of the Babylonian Marduk. And a polemical cultic commentary (SAA 3, nos. 34–5) reinterpreted the Babylonian Akitu festival, which celebrated Marduk's greatness, as a ritual enactment of his imprisonment (Machinist 1984/85; Frahm 1997: 282–8; Vera Chamaza 2000: 71–167).

While some of the religious reforms implemented by Sennacherib stayed in place after his murder in 681 BCE, the most radical measures the king had taken were soon reversed. Sennacherib's son and successor Esarhaddon (680–669) followed the example of his grandfather Sargon II in wearing again both the Assyrian and the Babylonian crown, and slowly started to rebuild Babylon. Temples in other Babylonian cities profited from construction work sponsored by the Assyrian king as well. Yet even though Esarhaddon sought to reestablish a balance of power between Assur and Marduk, and between Assyrian and Babylonian gods in general, he clearly believed that in political and military terms, Assyria should remain fully in charge (Porter 1993; Vera Chamaza 2002: 168–237).

Esarhaddon seems to have remained uneasy about leaving the Assyrian and Babylonian crowns in one hand, and so he determined that one of his sons, Assurbanipal, would succeed him as Assyrian king while another, Šamaš-šumu-ukin, would become the new king of Babylon. After their accessions, in 669 and 668 BCE, respectively, the two brothers remained on friendly terms for some sixteen years (Frame 1992: 64–101). Šamaš-šumu-ukin ruled as a largely ceremonial leader in the south, engaged in cultivating ancient Babylonian traditions while also patronizing a temple in Babylon that was dedicated to the goddess Ištar of Nineveh (Da Riva and Frahm 1999/2000). In the meantime, Assurbanipal sought to consolidate and enhance Assyria's hegemonic position through political and military initiatives all over Western Asia. But he also took great interest in Babylonia, especially its culture and religion. Educated in cuneiform writing and eager to collect in his residence in Nineveh as many learned cuneiform texts as possible, he asked the leading scholars and scribes of Babylon and Borsippa, as early as 664/63 BCE, to send him all the tablets they could find (Frame and George 2005). Like his father, Assurbanipal corresponded with Babylonian scholars on a wide range of religious and intellectual topics (see SAA 8 and SAA 10) and offered some of them positions at the Nineveh court (Fincke 2014). A number of Late Assyrian "synchronistic" king lists catalog not only the rulers of Assyria and Babylonia, but also their respective chief scholars (Grayson, *RIA* 6: 116–25).

In 652 BCE, dismayed by the constant interferences by his brother in Babylonian affairs, Šamaš-šumu-ukin decided to break away from Assyria. Assurbanipal sought to keep the citizens of Babylon on his side by simultaneously flattering and threatening them in a number of letters (Parpola 2004), but to no avail. The bloody war that ensued between the two brothers lasted four years. Even though Šamaš-šumu-ukin received support from various allies, most importantly Elam, the conflict ended with a Babylonian defeat and the death of the king. The city of Babylon, which had been exposed to a long and arduous siege, suffered heavily in the course of the fighting (Frame 1992: 131–90). A number of Babylonians were captured, brought to Nineveh, and killed at the spot where Sennacherib had been murdered some thirty-two years earlier, serving, in Assurbanipal's words, as "funerary offerings" for his grandfather (Borger 1996: 44, 235; SAA 3: no. 44).

Assurbanipal installed a certain Kandalanu as puppet king over Babylonia and ordered the transfer of significant numbers of additional cuneiform texts from Babylonian libraries to Assyria (Parpola 1983). Many tablets from Nineveh are, in fact, written in Babylonian script (Fincke 2003/04). Other Late Assyrian libraries housed texts related to Babylonia as well. Tablets from the library of the influential Baba-šumu-ibni family in Ashur, among them the "Sargon Geography" and the "Marduk Prophecy," suggest that Assyrian intellectuals were engaged in an intense discourse on Babylonian history and religion during the last decades of the Assyrian empire (Frahm, KAL 3: 7–8; Maul 2010).

The many humiliations Babylonia had suffered at the hands of Assyrian kings, especially in the seventh century, left the people there with a deep resentment against their northern neighbor. It therefore comes as no surprise that they seized the opportunity to take their revenge when it finally came. After Assurbanipal's death in 631 BCE, Assyria suffered a period of weakness, which was exacerbated by the rise of the Medes, a new formidable military power in the east. Under the leadership of Nabopolassar, the Babylonians entered into an alliance with the Medes, and together they overthrew the Assyrian empire after a period of intense fighting that lasted from 627 to 609 BCE (Fuchs 2014). One final historical irony was that Nabopolassar, the new Babylonian king, apparently came from a family that had strong Assyrian ties – several of its members had served as high officials on behalf of Assyrian kings in the city of Uruk (Jursa 2007).

In Babylonia, the memory of Assyria, and certain Assyrian practices and institutions, remained alive for many centuries to come (see [Chapter 28](#) and Da Riva 2014). But in the core area of what had once been the state of Assyria, with cuneiform writing abandoned and political independence lost, the special relationship that had previously existed with the south seems to have fallen into oblivion fairly quickly.

Abbreviations

KAL 3

= E. Frahm, *Historische und historisch-literarische Texte*, Keilschrifttexte aus Assur literarischen Inhalts 3, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2009.

RIMA

= A.K. Grayson, *The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Assyrian Periods*, 3 volumes, Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1987–96.

RIA

= *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie*, Berlin: De Gruyter 1928–.

SAA

= S. Parpola (ed.), *State Archives of Assyria*, 19 volumes published, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press 1987–.

YOS 13

= J.J. Finkelstein, *Late Old Babylonian Documents and Letters*, Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts, vol. 13, New Haven: Yale University Press 1972.

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Further Reading

For a general assessment of Assyro-Babylonian relations through the ages, see Galter 2007. Studies focusing on the political dimension of these relations during specific periods include Galter 1986 and Charpin and Durand 1997 (Old Babylonian), Llop 2001 (Late Bronze Age), Frame 2008 (858–612 BCE), Brinkman 1979 and 1984 (747–627 BCE), Brinkman 1973 (705–681 BCE), and Frame 1992 (689–627 BCE). On the role of the eastern Tigris region as a contested area in Assyro-Babylonian border disputes from the 16th century BCE onwards, see Fuchs 2011. For Babylonian religion in Assyria in the Middle Assyrian period, see Wiggerman 2008. Frame 1999 discusses the roles of Marduk in Assyria and of Assur in Babylonia. On Sennacherib’s religious reform, see Machinist 1984/85 and Frahm 1997: 282–8. For Assyrian religious politics and their Babylonian background from 722 to 669 BCE, see Vera Chamaza 2002. Fincke 2003/04 provides an overview of the Babylonian tablets in Assurbanipal’s libraries.

Note

¹ Because Assyria’s encounter with its southern neighbor was so formative

for its civilization, the early history of this relationship is discussed here at greater length than Assyria's early history with other regions is in this book.

CHAPTER 16

Assyria and the Far South: The Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf

Eckart Frahm

Introduction

During the 12th century BCE, the complex state system that had emerged in Western Asia in the Late Bronze Age collapsed (see [Chapters 6](#) and [8](#)). The power vacuum left by this breakdown led to the rise of ethnic groups that had been heavily fragmented before but now began to metamorphose into cohesive political units, often organized along ethnic-tribal lines. Besides the Phrygians, Hebrews, and Aramaeans, these groups also included the Arabs. The emergence of the Arabs as significant political players was primarily owed to the large-scale introduction of domesticated dromedary camels in southern Syria and on the Arabian Peninsula around the turn of the millennium (Heide 2010; Sapir-Hen and Ben-Yosef 2013). Using camels allowed the Arabs to traverse stretches of desert that had been previously impassable and thus engage in a newly emerging international trade in spices and precious materials, as well as in super-regional politics.

When the Assyrians, in the course of the ninth century BCE, expanded their military reach beyond the Euphrates River, they came for the first time into contact with groups of Arabs infiltrating the Levant from northern Arabia and the Syrian desert. Soon after, the Assyrians were interacting with Arabs on a regular basis, not only militarily but also politically and economically. A significant number of Arabic personal and tribal names are attested in Late Assyrian sources (Zadok 1981, 2013), and there are Akkadian loan words in Arabic and vice versa (Krebern timer 2008). In the eighth and seventh centuries, especially during Assyria's imperial phase, even regions further south, such as the kingdom of Sheba in modern Yemen, came into the purview of Assyria's kings.

The following paragraphs provide a short overview of Assyro-Arabian relations during the Neo-Assyrian period. Assyrian interactions with people living in the region beyond the main deserts of the Arabian Peninsula are considered as well. The overview is mostly based on the testimony of Assyrian royal inscriptions, letters, and a few other cuneiform texts. Of the ca. 50,000 (mostly very short) pre-Islamic inscriptions in Ancient North Arabian, only few seem to date to the Assyrian period, and the archaeology of northern

Arabia is still poorly explored (for Dūmat al-Gʿandal, see, e.g., al-Muaikel 1994). The early rulers of Sheba in South Arabia left some more extensive texts, but none of them mention interactions with Assyria.

From the Beginnings to the Reign of Tiglath-pileser III

The earliest reference to Arabs in any written source is found in an inscription on the so-called Kurkh Monolith in which the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (858–824 BCE) describes a battle he fought in 853 BCE in the vicinity of Qarqar on the Orontes River against an alliance of western and southwestern polities. The enemy coalition mentioned in the text included the kings of Damascus, Hamath, Israel, and several other states, as well as a certain “Gindibu’ the Arab” (*Igi-in-di-bu-u’ kur_{ar}-ba-a-a*), who is said to have contributed 1000 camels to the allied forces (RIMA 3: 23). The designation *kur_{ar}-ba-a-a* is an Akkadian *nisbe* form derived from *Arabu* (or, with Assyrian vowel harmony: *Arubu*, *Aribi*), the general term for Arabs used by the Assyrians. It corresponds to ‘*Arāb*(î) in the Hebrew Bible and the (later) ethnicon ‘*arab* employed by the Arab people themselves. “Gindibu’” is a cuneiform rendering of Arabic *ġundub*, which means “locust” (Krebern timer 2008: 257). Characteristically, Gindibu’ is the only member of the coalition who is said to have provided camels – the other allies sent chariots, horses, and infantry troops. As pointed out above, camels were closely associated with the Arabs from early on, and a number of Akkadian words for different types of camels (*gam(m)alu*, *bakkaru*, *anaqātu*, *ibilu*) can be shown to be loan-words from Arabic (Krebern timer 2008: 259).

The few surviving Assyrian royal inscriptions from the first half of the eighth century, when the Assyrian monarchy was weak, do not report any encounters with Arabs. But a mid-eighth century cuneiform inscription commissioned by Ninurta-kudurri-ušur, a largely independent “governor” (*šakin māti*) of Suḥu and Mari in the middle Euphrates region, claims that this ruler organized a raid on a caravan “of the people of Tema and Šaba” near the town of Hindanu and took camels, wool, iron(?), and precious stones as booty from them (RIMB 2: p. 300). This is the first cuneiform reference to the important city of Tema (or Taymā’), a commercial hub and religious center in the Hejaz in western Arabia (Edens and Bawden 1989; Potts 1991). Unless a different Sheba further north is meant, it is also the first reference to Sheba in south Arabia, a main source of the ever more significant overland trade in incense and precious stones (Robin 1991–93; Galter 1993). It is quite likely that the caravan intercepted by Ninurta-kudurri-ušur was on its way to (or back from) Assyria. From the reigns of Sargon II and Sennacherib, a few decades later, we have unequivocal evidence for commercial exchanges between Assyria,

Tema, and Sheba.

Assyria's massive western expansion under Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BCE) brought Assyrian troops again into direct contact with Arabs (Eph'al 1984: 81–100). In 738, after his annexation of Unqi and Ḥatarikka, Tiglath-pileser received "tribute" from numerous rulers from the southwest, including "Zabibe, queen of the Arabs." Her gifts were probably sent in the hope of preventing the Assyrians from intervening in the overland trade controlled by the Arabs. Five years later, the Assyrian king campaigned at Mount Saqurri, to the south of Damascus, against another Arab queen, Samsi, burnt her tents, and seized camels, aromatics, and other goods from her as booty (Tadmor 1994: 222–30). Tiglath-pileser's main goal in all this was to consolidate his control over southern Syria. Realizing that he did not have the means to eliminate Samsi's tribal proto-state, Qedar, which was centered in and around the Wādī Sirḥān in northern Arabia, he allowed Samsi to remain in office, but with an Assyrian political agent (*qēpu*) close by who was to guide her political moves.

Zabibe and Samsi are the first of altogether six women (the others are Yati'e, Te'elḥunu, Tabua, and Adia) who, according to Assyrian royal inscriptions, served as Arab "queens" (*šarratu*) during the period from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III to that of Assurbanipal. Given that the title *šarratu* is accorded in Assyrian texts to "reigning queens" and goddesses only, not to the main wives of kings, there can be no doubt that women played a vital political role among the early Arabs, even though Shalmaneser's Kurkh Monolith and several later inscriptions also mention a number of male Arab rulers. In addition to their political tasks, and probably closely connected to them, the Arab queens held certain religious functions – according to Sennacherib's inscriptions, one of them, Te'elḥunu, served as *apkallatu*-priestess (= *'fkl*) of her people (see Maraqtan 2000). The Arab queens of the eighth and seventh centuries seem to have fascinated the patriarchal societies of first millennium Western Asia – the Biblical story about the queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1–13) may well draw on encounters of Judeans with female leaders of north Arabian tribes (Frahm 1999: 85; see also Avanzini 1991–93). Based on the etymologies of their names, some scholars have suggested that a one-time main wife of Tiglath-pileser, Yabâ, and a main wife of the later Assyrian king Sargon II, Atalia, might have been of Arabic origin (see Frahm 2014: 187 with further literature), but this remains highly uncertain.

Tiglath-pileser received gifts not only from Qedar, but also from a number of politically less well-organized Arab tribes, whose territories stretched from the Syro-Arabian desert to northern Sinai. Some of them, such as the Massa, are also mentioned in the Bible, as "sons of Ishmael" (Gen. 25:12–15). In order to stabilize the border region between Palestine and Sinai and foster international trade, Tiglath-pileser installed a certain Idibi'ilu (a tribal name identical with that of Ishmael's son Adbeel in Gen. 25:13) as "gate-keeper

towards Egypt” in the region between Gaza and El-Arish (Elat 1998: 48).

Sargon II and Sennacherib

After the short and poorly documented reign of Shalmaneser V, the energetic Sargon II (721–705 BCE) ascended the Assyrian throne. Assyrian policies towards the Arabs remained largely the same under this king, and no attempt was made to control the caravan routes in northern Arabia directly. In 715, however, the king ordered his troops to deport numerous members of Arab tribes that had been troublemakers in the preceding years, among them the Tamudi (Ṭamūd) and Ḥayapa (‘Ephah), and to settle them in the newly created province of Samaria in Israel (Eph‘al 1984: 105–7).

In the same year, Sargon received gifts from an unnamed Egyptian pharaoh (probably Osorkon IV, the king of Tanis and Bubastis in the eastern Nile delta, see Fuchs 1998: 131), the Arab queen Samsi – who had already been in office under Tiglath-pileser – and It’amra, the king of Sheba. It’amra, whose presents were undoubtedly geared towards improving commercial relations with Assyria, is the first ruler of Sheba named in a cuneiform text. He can be identified with the powerful Sabaean ruler (*mukarrib*) Yīṭa‘amar Watar bin Yakrubmalik, who is known from a recently excavated monumental inscription from Ṣirwāḥ in Yemen (Nebes 2007; Arbach 2014). The inscription provides information on some of Yīṭa‘amar’s military campaigns and is, as far as we know, the first of its kind. It is tempting to hypothesize that its creation was inspired by the encounter of Sabaean diplomats and traders with monumental annalistic inscriptions in Assyrian palaces. Perhaps, this encounter with Assyria also had an impact on the formation of the Sabaean state at large, a development that can be dated to the second half of the eighth century BCE.

Another far away place in the south from where Sargon claims to have received gifts was Dilmun, modern Bahrain in the Persian Gulf. Sargon’s inscriptions mention two kings of Dilmun, Uperi and Aḥundari, who, in the wake of the Assyrian ruler’s reconquest of Babylonia in 710 BCE, subsequently came to bring him presents. Both names are Elamite (Zadok 1984: 13, 16), reflecting the close ties that have always existed (and still exist today) between Iran and Bahrain. The name Aḥundari corresponds to that of another ruler of Dilmun, Ḥundaru, who held his office during the time of Assurbanipal (Potts 1990: 335–6). Sargon emphasizes Dilmun’s remoteness (“an island thirty double hours away located in the sea of sunrise like a fish”) in order to show how far his fame had spread (Fuchs 1994: 390–8).

While Sargon’s royal inscriptions draw a picture of total control, several letters from his political correspondence indicate that Assyria’s relations with

Arab bedouins were, in fact, often quite tense. SAA 1, no. 84 mentions an Arab raid on Sippar. In SAA 1, no. 175, Adda-ḫati, the Assyrian governor of Hamath, reports that Arabs had attacked a caravan carrying booty from Damascus to Assyria and had escaped with their loot. In SAA 1, no. 179, Bel-liqbi, the governor of Šupat (in southern Syria), quotes from a letter of Sargon that strictly forbade the sale of iron to the Arabs – an early attempt at non-proliferation of materials that might help a political opponent to enhance his military capacities. At the same time, as indicated by SAA 1, no. 177, Assyrian officials were eager to promote peaceful relations with the Arabs in order to facilitate trade with them (see Fales 1989; Elat 1998: 44–5).

Assyro-Arabian trade continued to be of significant economic importance after the accession of Sargon's son Sennacherib (704–681 BCE) – so much so, in fact, that the “Desert Gate,” a new monumental city gate built by the new king in 694 in Nineveh, received the additional name “The gifts of the people of Sumu'il and Tema enter through it” (Frahm 1997: 273–5).

Both Sumu'il and Tema played key roles on the Arabian Peninsula during the Late Assyrian period. Tema's trade relations with Assyria had their roots in the mid-eighth century (see above, “From the Beginnings to the Reign of Tiglath-pileser III”). Over time, the contacts seem to have led to certain changes in the western Arabian caravan town. A fragmentary relief found at Tema shows features of Neo-Assyrian style, suggesting that Tema's local elites sought to emulate Assyrian culture (Potts 1991).

Sumu'il, represented in the Bible by Abraham's son Ishmael, was the designation of a tribal confederation that had established a powerful proto-state in the Wādī Sirḥān in northern Saudi-Arabia. The federation was led by the Qedarites, who had already interacted with Tiglath-pileser III. The federation's political and religious center was the oasis town of Dūmat al-G'andal, in the Jawf region, which the Assyrians called Adummatu, Duma, or Dumeti (genitive with Assyrian vowel harmony) (Knauf 1989; Frahm 1999: 86–9; Anthonioz 2015). According to a recent study (Avanzini 2012), the culture of the Jawf area and other regions along north Arabian trade routes was strongly influenced by Sabaeans who had moved northwards from Yemen.

Despite ongoing trade activities, relations between Assyria and Sumu'il became increasingly hostile under Sennacherib (Eph'al 1984: 112–25). In 703, Assyrian soldiers fighting in Babylonia captured a certain Basqanu, brother of the Arab (and most likely Qedarite) queen Yati'e, along with his troops (RINAP 3/1: 34). Basqanu had provided military support to Assyria's Chaldaean arch-enemy Marduk-aplu-iddina II, who had usurped the Babylonian throne in the wake of Sargon II's death in 705. Marduk-aplu-iddina's contacts with the Arabs probably began much earlier – the tribute he paid Tiglath-pileser III in 731 included gold and precious stones (RINAP 1: 137), items he had most likely received from Arabs (Elat 1998: 46).

According to the Bible (2 Kings 20:12–15), Marduk-aplu-iddina was also allied with Hezekiah of Judah, whom the Assyrians attacked in 701 in his capital in Jerusalem. Some scholars believe that Hezekiah enjoyed support from Arabs as well, but the matter is debated. Sennacherib’s annals report that one of the conditions under which Hezekiah was allowed to stay in office after he surrendered to the Assyrian king was the release of his “*urbi* troops” (RINAP 3/1: 66), a term that refers either to some kind of Ḫabiru-like irregular auxiliary force or to a group of Arabs (see Frahm 1997: 104–5; Lipiński 2000: 423; Na’aman 2000: 621–4; Retsö 2003: 155–6, among others). All in all, the former possibility is slightly more likely. In Herodotus’s account of Sennacherib’s western campaign, it is, incidentally, the Assyrian ruler himself who is associated with Arabs – the Greek historian calls him “king of the Arabs and the Assyrians” (*Hist.* 2.141). This inaccurate designation may have been the result of conflation with later stories about Esarhaddon’s conquest of Egypt (see below, “From Esarhaddon to the Downfall of the Assyrian Empire”).

In 694, in the wake of a failed attempt to conquer Elam by sending a fleet along the Persian Gulf, Sennacherib lost control over Babylonia. In the course of the following years, while seeking to reestablish Assyrian power in the south, the Assyrian king campaigned again against Sumu’il and the Qedarites, who continued to side with anti-Assyrian forces. This time, Sennacherib carried the fight into the heart of the rising Arab state and further south than any Assyrian army had ever ventured before. In 690, Assyrian troops defeated the Arab queen Te’elḫunu and her male associate, a certain Ḫaza’il, in some unspecified desert region, attacked and conquered Adummatu (Dūmat al-G’andal), and forced the Arab dignitaries to flee to Kapanu, modern Kāf further northwest in the Wādī Sirḥān. Te’elḫunu was captured and brought to Nineveh, together with a large booty that comprised divine statues, camels, spices, and precious stones (Frahm 1997: 129–36).

Some of the precious stones seized by the Assyrian troops in Adummatu, beads made of banded agate that were inscribed by the conquerors with short cuneiform texts labeling them as “booty from Duma,” were found in the course of modern excavations at Nineveh (Frahm 1999: 86–9). Other agate beads discovered at Nineveh had reached the Assyrian royal court, according to their inscriptions, as “audience gifts of Karibili, king of Sheba.” This ruler is most likely to be identified with Karib’il Watar, a *mukarrib* of Sheba who ruled shortly after Yiṭa’amar Watar, the aforementioned contemporary of Sennacherib’s father Sargon II. Like the latter, Karib’il Watar left a long inscription in Širwāḥ, which deals with his campaigns and hydraulic construction works. Since both these topics are prominently covered in Sennacherib’s royal inscriptions, one can again speculate that Assyrian monumental texts, encountered by the Sabaean delegation in Nineveh, might have been imitated by the royal scribes of Sheba (Frahm 1999: 84–6; for a

more skeptical view, Potts 2003). This would be in line with the observation that a Sabaeen bronze relief from the region of Mārib in Yemen and a few fragmentary stone reliefs from unknown locations in South Arabia seem to be inspired by Assyrian and Syro-Palestinian art of the Late Assyrian period (Gerlach 2000; Lanfranchi 2004: 248–51).

Sennacherib claims in one of his inscriptions that he deposited some of the precious stones sent to him by Karibili of Sheba in the foundations of his new Akitu temple in Ashur (RINAP 3/2: 248–9), which was built a few years after the Assyrian king's 689 BCE conquest of the city of Babylon. Another southern monarch who showed his support for the Assyrian cause in the wake of this momentous event was an unnamed king of Dilmun, who, according to the same Sennacherib inscription, saw the debris of Babylon carried all the way to his coasts, became frightened, and sent not only an audience gift, but also men with spades and other implements to participate in Babylon's further destruction. The passage is obviously marked by a significant amount of hyperbole, but the contacts with Dilmun were most likely real.

From Esarhaddon to the Downfall of the Assyrian Empire

King Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE), Sennacherib's successor (Eph'al 1984: 125–42), initially pursued a far less aggressive policy towards the south. Not only did he seek reconciliation with the Babylonians by rebuilding Babylon, he also tried to win the hearts and minds of the Qedarites in Adummatu by first refurbishing and then returning the divine statues that Sennacherib had seized in 690 BCE (RINAP 4: 19, 30–1). The passage that names the deities, among them 'Attarsamayīn (a celestial goddess probably identical with Alilat), Nuhay (a solar deity), and Ruḏā (= Orotalt, identified by Herodotus with Dionysus), is one of the most important sources for our knowledge of early north Arabian religion (Knauf 1989: 81–8).

The return of the divine statues was not unconditional, however. Esarhaddon had supplied them with inscriptions that celebrated himself and his god Assur, and he sent them back together with an Arab woman, Tabua, probably a relative of Te'elḥunu (perhaps even her daughter with Sennacherib, even though this is highly speculative), who had been raised in Assyria and was intended to become the new queen of the Arabs. For a short while, this arrangement seems to have worked well for Assyria. The Arab leader Ḥaza'il, whose exact relationship with Tabua is unclear, and, later, his son Ya(u)ta (Yauṭa') continued to send tribute. But at some point between 676 and 673 BCE, a certain Uabu (Wahb) rebelled against Ya(u)ta, who had to ask for Assyrian help in order to be reinstalled as leader of the Arabs. Later, to show

that he was more than a puppet ruler, Ya(u)ta threw off the Assyrian yoke and ceased to pay tribute, which prompted Esarhaddon to conduct another campaign against the Arabs, briefly described in Assurbanipal's "letter to the god" (Eph'al 1984: 125–30).

In 677/76 or slightly earlier (see Eph'al 1984: 126), Esarhaddon undertook a logistically challenging campaign against Bazu, a politically fragmented district portrayed in his inscriptions as a vast, remote desert region filled with snakes and scorpions. In the course of the attack, the Assyrian ruler defeated six kings and two queens, several of whom bore what seem to be Arab names (Qisu, Akbaru, Ḥabisu), and appointed a certain Layale, king of the city of Yadi', as Bazu's new ruler (RINAP 4: 20–1, 31, 155). Layale still held his office in 653 BCE (see PNA 2/II: 650–1).

There has been some discussion about the exact location of Bazu. Potts (1999) identified it with Basianis, which a Latin itinerary from the Azraq Oasis in eastern Jordan locates sixty-six miles from "Bostra" (modern Busra in southern Syria). All things considered, however, it is more probable, as suggested by Eph'al (1984: 130–7), that Bazu was located in northeastern Arabia, to the west of the Persian Gulf and in close proximity to Dilmun. To the arguments adduced by Eph'al one can add that the toponyms Diḥranu, Qaṭaba', Ga'uanu, and Puda', cities linked in Esarhaddon's inscriptions to Bazu, may well live on in the modern place names (aḏ-)Ḍahrān (Dhahran), (al-)Qatīf, ('Ayn) G'awān, and Fūda, all located in the area in question. Another clue is provided by Esarhaddon's claim that he entered Bazu through "Mount Ḥazû, the mountain of *saggilmud* stone." Lexical lists equate *saggilmud* with Akkadian ḥašmānu (a colored stone), which brings to mind that a land called Ḥasmānu was situated "next to (*ina aḥi*) Dilmun" according to Assurbanipal's Ištar Temple inscription (Fuchs, in Borger 1996: 283–4, 294). Bazu is also mentioned in the first line of the so-called "Sargon Geography," a cosmological-topographical text known from a Late Assyrian tablet from Assur and a Late Babylonian manuscript (Horowitz 1998: 67–95). Apparently, Esarhaddon also received tribute from Qanâ, the king of Dilmun (RINAP 4: 135), but the reading of the pertinent line is not entirely certain (Eph'al 1984: 135–6).

Further west, Esarhaddon had a final encounter with Arabs in 671, on the occasion of his second, successful, campaign against Egypt. In order to enter Egypt from Palestine, the Assyrian troops apparently did not take the so-called *via maris* along the Mediterranean coast, but rather a route through the Sinai desert (Radner 2008). This was only possible with the help of Arab bedouins, who provided the Assyrians with camels and logistical aid (Eph'al 1984: 137–42). A so far unpublished stone stela from Qaqun in central Israel singles out the Arab tribe of Mibsam (one of the sons of Ishmael according to Gen. 25:12–16) as having been instrumental in enabling the Assyrian troops to cross the Sinai Peninsula (RINAP 4: 190).

Under Assurbanipal (668–631 BCE), Assyrian military pressure against Qedar and other Arab tribal states reached its peak (Weippert 1973/74; Eph'al 1984: 142–69; Lanfranchi 2004: 239–44; Bagg 2011: 265–8). Assurbanipal's numerous inscriptions provide detailed information on the events, but a lack of chronological specification and a tendency among royal scribes to heavily re-edit earlier accounts (see Gerardi 1992) make it occasionally difficult to obtain a historically reliable picture from the sources.

One can divide Assurbanipal's campaigns against the Arabs into two phases. During the first phase, dated by Eph'al to 652 at the very latest, Assurbanipal's troops fought against the Qedarite leader Yauta son of Ḫaza'il, who had again broken away from Assyria. After battles in Transjordan and southern Syria, Yauta fled to the land of Nabayatu in northwestern Arabia (whose ruler, Natnu, did not grant him asylum, however) and was replaced by Abiyate (Abiyate') son of Te'ri. A tablet from Nineveh preserves a treaty the latter had to sign with the Assyrian king on this occasion (SAA 2, no. 10) – evidently, the Assyrians tried to “domesticate” the Arabs by integrating them into the world of international diplomacy. In a highly hyperbolic passage in one of his inscriptions, Assurbanipal claims that his troops seized so many camels and took so many prisoners in the course of their Arab campaigns that people in Assyria paid gardeners, brewers, and tavern-keepers with camels and captives. The Arabs, in the meantime, paid for their insurrection, according to the Assyrian king, with a terrible famine, imposed upon them by the gods (Borger 1996: 244).

During the years of the Šamaš-šumu-ukin rebellion in Babylon, which lasted from 652 to 648 BCE, Qedarite troops sent by U'aite (U'aite') son of Birdada supported Assurbanipal's faithless brother. They were led by the aforementioned Abiyate (whom the treaty had not prevented from almost immediate defection) and his brother Ayam(m)u. All these men remained at large for quite some time. It was only after he had defeated both Babylon and Elam, probably in 645, that Assurbanipal was finally able to take his revenge against them, by initiating a second phase of campaigning in Arab territories. After various battles in a region that stretched from Palmyra to al-Laḡā south of Damascus, Abiyate, Ayam(m)u, U'aite, and eventually also Natnu of Nabayatu were captured and brought to Nineveh. U'aite, like other Arab rulers before him, was brutally tortured and exposed to the public in the gate that led to the citadel of Nineveh, while Ayam(m)u was flayed. Assurbanipal considered his battles against the Arabs important enough to celebrate them in a long letter to the god Assur (Borger 1996: 76–82, with earlier literature) and to represent them on bas-reliefs in his palaces in Nineveh (see, e.g., SAA 1, p. 68; SAA 2, p. 69).

Due to an increasing paucity of sources, we do not know what happened in the Arab territories in southwestern Syria and northern Arabia in the aftermath of the “second phase” of Assurbanipal's Arab campaigns. In all likelihood,

they slipped away from Assyrian domination almost immediately. In contrast to the Babylonian king Nabonidus, who, roughly one century later, resided for ten years in the oasis town of Tema, Assurbanipal never controlled the region over an extended period of time.

Like his father Esarhaddon, Assurbanipal was also engaged in eastern Arabia and the Persian Gulf region. In an inscription from Uruk written some time before 652 BCE, the king marks the boundaries of his realm by referring, on one hand, to Tyre “in the midst of the Upper Sea” (i.e., the Mediterranean) and, on the other, to Dilmun “in the midst of the Lower Sea” (i.e., the Persian Gulf) (RIMB 2, p. 226). A number of letters provide evidence that Ḫundaru, the king of Dilmun, did indeed pay Assurbanipal tribute, even though there were suspicions, during the time of the Šamaš-šumu-ukin rebellion, that he sided with the Babylonians (Frame 1992: 135, 177, 209). In one of his latest inscriptions, a fragmentary text from the Ištār temple in Nineveh, Assurbanipal confirms that he received tribute from Ḫundaru. The inscription refers, moreover, to gifts sent to the Assyrian king by Šiḫum (or Šilum) of Ḫasmanu, a land situated next to Dilmun, [(...)]-ra-a-BAD-te king of Luppi (location unknown), and Pade king of Qade, “who lives in Izke” (Fuchs in Borger 1996: 283–4, 294). Qade is identical with ancient Magan (Oman), and Izke with Izki, an old city in the northeast of Oman (Potts 1990: 393–4). It allegedly took Pade’s emissaries six months to arrive in Nineveh.

The Ištār Temple inscription is the latest text that provides significant information about Assyro-Arabian relations. During the last years of Assurbanipal’s reign and the reigns of his successors, Assyria was shaken by internal conflict and all-out war with the Babylonians and Medes, who destroyed the Assyrian empire in 612 BCE. Whether any Arabs were involved in Assyria’s downfall is unknown to us.

Conclusion

During its imperial phase, Assyria interacted with various states, cities, and tribes in southern Syria, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Persian Gulf region. Of particular importance were the Assyrian contacts with the tribal confederation of Sumu’il, which was led by the Arab Qedarites. Its political center was the Wādī Sirḥān in northern Arabia, but, thanks to their skilled use of camels, Qedarites also penetrated Transjordan and southern Syria in the west and Babylonia in the east. In both regions, their raids and political machinations forced the Assyrians to take repeated military action against them.

Assyrian armies were also active in northeastern Arabia, where they fought against Bazu, a territory located in close proximity to Dilmun (Bahrain).

Assyrian encounters with other places in the “far south” were more peaceful and limited to trade and diplomacy. In the east, Assyrian contacts reached from Dilmun to Qade in modern Oman; in the western part of the Arabian Peninsula, the oasis town of Tema played an important role in Arabian-Assyrian trade; and in the south, in modern Yemen, rulers of the emerging state of Sheba sent emissaries to the Assyrian royal court.

For the Assyrians, the benefits reaped from their interaction with the Arabian Peninsula were primarily of an economic nature. The Arab-controlled caravan trade that existed since the domestication of the dromedary camel provided Assyria with incense, spices, precious stones, and metals from sources hitherto inaccessible. In addition, the Assyrians employed members of Arab tribes and used their camels when they campaigned on the Arabian Peninsula or in the Sinai region.

Less clear is whether Assyria adopted any of the political and cultural practices of the Arabs. It has been observed that the political agency and general visibility of Assyrian royal women increased markedly during the reign of Sennacherib, and one wonders whether such tendencies may not have been, at least in part, a consequence of Assyrian encounters with the remarkably powerful Arabian queens of the eighth and early seventh centuries (Frahm 2014: 214). While this remains conjectural, it is obvious that the Assyrians were fascinated by the Arab world. Assyrian kings described their campaigns against Arabs in long inscriptions and letters to the god Assur, and had them depicted on bas-reliefs in their palaces. Also worth noting are twelve seals in Assyrian style, unfortunately almost all from unknown locations (one of them was reportedly found in Anah on the Middle Euphrates), that bear inscriptions in the South Semitic script used on the Arabian Peninsula (Sass 1991: 32–76). Interestingly, several personal names inscribed on these seals seem not to be Arabic but rather Assyrian or Babylonian, “indicating either an assimilating South Arabian element in the population, or a custom of Mesopotamians with ties to Arabia to have their seals inscribed in the local languages” (Sass 1991: 32). An Assyrian seal impression with an Akkadian name written in an Arabian alphabet on a tablet from Tell Sheikh Hamad is of particular interest because the tablet can be dated to ca. 634 BCE (Sass 2015).

The cultural impact the Assyrian empire had on the inhabitants of the Arabian peninsula was in all likelihood more considerable than that of the Arabs on Assyria (Lanfranchi 2004: 244–52). Despite the ultimate failure of Assyrian attempts to subdue the various Arab tribes and fully control the Syro-Arabian desert and its oases, Assyrian civilization left a clear mark on the region. The formation of a well-organized Arab proto-state in the Wādī Sirḥān, with its fortified capital at Dūma, would probably not have occurred without the military pressure exerted by the Assyrians and the model Assyria provided, even though one must take into account that Sabaean influence played a role too (Avanzini 2012). The fact that from the time of Esarhaddon onwards,

Assyrian royal inscriptions mention more male than female Arab leaders may reflect changes within the political fabric of the Arab tribes that could have been triggered by Assyrian practices as well. The refurbishment and return of the divine statues of Dūma under Esarhaddon provides an example of Assyrian influence in the religious sphere.

Assyria presumably also inspired cultural change in other, more distant places on the Arabian Peninsula. Elements of Assyrian style and iconography have been detected on bas-reliefs from Tema and Sheba, and it seems possible that the elaborate inscriptions of two rulers of Sheba who were contemporaries of Sargon II and Sennacherib, respectively, were inspired by monumental inscriptions in cuneiform writing that Sabaean emissaries had encountered in Assyrian palaces.

Abbreviations

PNA

= K. Radner and H. Baker (eds.), *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project 1998–2011.

RIMA

= A.K. Grayson, *The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Assyrian Periods*, 3 volumes, Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1987–96.

RIMB 2

= G. Frame, *Rulers of Babylonia from the Second Dynasty of Isin to the End of Assyrian Domination (1157–612 B.C.)*, Toronto: Toronto University Press.

RINAP

= G. Frame (ed.), *The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Neo-Assyrian Period*, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns 2011–.

SAA

= S. Parpola (ed.), *State Archives of Assyria*, 19 volumes published, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press 1987–.

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Further Reading

Eph'al 1984: 20–169 provides a comprehensive account of the relations between Assyria and the Arabs from the ninth to the seventh century BCE (see also Retsö 2003: 119–70 and Anthonioz 2015). On Arabs in Assyrian royal inscriptions, see Lanfranchi 2004. For linguistic aspects of the Assyrian sources regarding the early Arabs, see Krebernig 2008. Assurbanipal's campaigns against the Arabs are analyzed by Weippert 1973/74 and Gerardi

1992. On Arabic names in Late Assyrian (and other cuneiform) sources, see Zadok 1981. The role of Arab tribes in Babylonia in Neo-Assyrian times is discussed by Frame 2013: 116–17. North Arabian trade routes and goods in the first millennium BCE are the topic of MacDonald 1997. Elat 1998 discusses economic aspects of the relations between Assyria and Arabia. For the early history of Sumu'il/Ishmael, see Knauf 1989, and for that of southern Arabia, Robin 1991–93. The relations between Sheba and the Assyrians are analyzed by Galter 1993, Nebes 2007, and Arbach 2014. On the interaction between Sheba, Dūmat al-Gʿandal, and Assyria in the early seventh century, see Frahm 1999. Possible Assyrian influences on the art of Tema and Sheba are discussed by Gerlach 2000. General accounts of the archaeology and history of the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf in antiquity are Magee 2014 and Potts 1990.

PART III

Elements of Assyrian Civilization

CHAPTER 17

Languages and Writing Systems in Assyria

Mikko Luukko and Greta Van Buylaere

The Assyrians spoke and wrote Assyrian, a dialect of Akkadian (an East Semitic language, written in cuneiform script), but their land, Assyria, was also home to other ethnic groups that had their own cultures and languages. From the time of our first written sources onwards, at the end of the third millennium BCE (all following dates are BCE), Assyria's ethno-linguistic landscape was characterized by a considerable degree of diversity, which was nourished by trade, military expansion, and migration. Aramaic, a West Semitic language written in alphabetic script, gained particular prominence in the multifaceted linguistic environment of the Assyrian Empire and its periphery. By the end of the Neo-Assyrian Period, Aramaic was widely used in the Near East as the *lingua franca*. This chapter is intended to present the reader with an overview of the history of the languages and writing systems used in Assyria and its periphery, with particular emphasis upon the history, development, and grammatical nuances of Akkadian, particularly the Assyrian dialect.*

Languages

Assyrian

The Assyrian language and the eponymous language of Babylonia, Assyria's southern neighbor, are the two main dialects of Akkadian. Although most modern scholars view the two dialects as separate forms of the same language, ancient scribes considered Babylonian and Assyrian distinct languages, not subsumed under the overarching identifier "Akkadian" as used by modern Assyriologists:

The ancients thought in terms of two separate languages. The term *akkadûm* "Akkadian" was used to refer to ... Babylonian, often in specific contrast to Sumerian, Assyrian or Aramaic. The ancient Assyrians called their tongue *aššurû* or *aššurāyu* "Assyrian," often in opposition to *armāyu*

“Aramaic”. Though Babylonian and Assyrian are today treated as variant forms of Akkadian, they are sufficiently distinct in grammar and vocabulary that one could make a good case for speaking of them as separate languages, as the ancients did. On the other hand, they exhibit a parallel history in several aspects of their grammatical development. [...] Synchronic evolution of this kind speaks for a close historical relationship.

(George 2007: 31–3)

The challenges of a diachronic, comparative study of Assyrian and Babylonian aside, scholars focusing on the Assyrian dialect alone are faced with several distinct forms of the language, classified by chronological period. The earliest phases of Assyrian are poorly understood (Parpola 1988). The first written records in Assyrian are attested in the Old Assyrian period (ca. 2000–1700), hence the designation “Old Assyrian” (OA). We can distinguish two other forms of Assyrian: Middle Assyrian (MA, ca. 1400–1050) and Neo-Assyrian (NA, ca. 930–600). Unfortunately, the extant textual material is not evenly distributed throughout Assyria’s history or geography; in fact, written sources have yet to be uncovered from many places and periods, hindering a truly comprehensive diachronic study of the language. Nevertheless, we can attempt to trace the most significant changes that took place in Assyrian phonology, morphology, and syntax with regards to the text corpus currently available. The Assyrian language was mainly used for writing letters and other archival documents, although some literary compositions in Assyrian survive (see [Chapter 19](#)). The vast majority of royal inscriptions, however, and most literary and scholarly texts were written in Standard Babylonian (SB), a non-vernacular dialect reserved for literary purposes. But the Assyrian scribes who wrote these texts often punctuated them with “Assyrianisms,” such as Assyrian vowel assimilation, grammatical idiosyncrasies, and specific idioms.

Over the course of the Neo-Assyrian period, the Assyrian dialect became more restricted in use in the face of the growing prominence of Aramaic, which was rapidly developing into the main spoken language of the empire. Yet despite the popularity of Aramaic, the Assyrian language remained in use, even after the fall of the Assyrian Empire in 612 BCE. It was probably not until around the middle of the first millennium BCE that Assyrian became extinct.

It should be briefly noted here that the language known as “modern Assyrian” should not be confused with ancient Assyrian or considered a direct descendant. “Modern Assyrian” is used to designate the eastern Neo-Aramaic dialects spoken by the Assyrian community today (see [Chapter 32](#)), and is a west Semitic language that bears little resemblance to ancient Assyrian.

Old Assyrian

In the Old Assyrian period, an extensive long-distance trade network linked the wealthy city-state of Ashur with eastern Anatolia. Old Assyrian sources from Ashur itself are few, but the commercial activities and personal affairs of the traders are well-documented by some 25,000 tablets excavated at Ashur's foremost commercial "colony" at Kaniš (Kültepe). The letters, legal documents, memoranda, notes, and lists vividly depict the socio-economic situation of the Assyrian family firms. A small number of similar documents were found at Ashur, **H**attuša, and other sites in Anatolia, northern Syria, and Mesopotamia. Non-commercial documents are scarce, but some historical and diplomatic texts, school texts, and incantations have been recovered. The royal inscriptions of this time were commemorative texts that recorded building projects and dedications to deities. During the reign of Šamši-Adad I, the dialect, style, and form of the inscriptions came under strong Babylonian influence.

The Old Assyrian scribes used a limited repertoire of mainly syllabic signs, which makes Old Assyrian relatively easy to decipher, although "the limitations of the syllabary and the not always strictly applied orthographic conventions require a well-considered choice between possible alternative phonetic values and readings, on the basis of grammatical and lexicographical facts, for reconstructing the phonetic and morphological facts" (Veenhof and Eidem 2008: 112). Thanks to this simplified writing system, Assyrian merchants could record their transactions and handle their correspondence without the need of a professional scribe. The literacy rate among the Assyrian merchants in Anatolia, who, despite the long distance, were in regular correspondence with their trading partners and families at Ashur, may have been relatively high. What follows, both in transliteration and translation, is a typical Old Assyrian letter (see [Figure 17.1](#) further below).



Figure 17.1 Three Assyrian letters (obverse). Left: The Old Assyrian letter BM 115199;

photo by G. Van Buylaere, courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Middle: Cast of the Middle Assyrian letter TCH 92.G.152;

photo by S. Jakob, courtesy of J.-W. Meyer.

Right: The Neo-Assyrian letter ND 2703;

photo by G. Van Buylaere, courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Text 1 An Old Assyrian letter (BM 115199 = CCT 4, 6; Larsen 2002: no. 117)

a-na A-šur-na-da

Say to Aššur-nada: thus says Iddin-Ištar:

qí-bi-ma um-ma I-dí-Ištar-/ma

5 GÍN KÙ.GI

Ikuppia, son of Daya, is bringing to you 5 shekels of *pašallu*-gold (under) my seals.

pá-ša-la-am

ku-nu-ki-a I-ku-pì-a

DUMU Da-a-a

na-áš-a-kum

a-bi₄ a-ta

You are my father, make a sacrifice before your god and pray for me!

ni-iq-a-am

IGI i-lì-kà

i-qí-ma ku-ru-ba-am

Middle Assyrian

The Middle Assyrian textual record is rather dispersed and many stages in the history of Middle Assyrian are still poorly documented. The available sources reveal a situation in which two languages were employed for written communications – letters and legal and administrative documents were generally written in Assyrian, whereas literary compositions and royal inscriptions were mostly written in Standard Babylonian. The majority of the Middle Assyrian sources comes from libraries and archives in the capital Ashur, with further records discovered at Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta and in several provincial towns, especially in Syria. In addition, two Middle Assyrian letters from king Aššur-uballiṭ (1353–1318 [1363–1328]) to Pharaoh Amenhotep IV were found at Amarna in Egypt. The Middle Assyrian texts stem mainly from the 13th and 12th centuries; sources from after the reign of Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076) are scarce.

Most letters and archival documents in Middle Assyrian concern agricultural production, as in the following letter (see [Figure 17.1](#) further below).

Text 2 A Middle Assyrian letter (TCH 92.G.152; Jakob 2009 no. 6)

<i>a-na</i> ^m <i>Su-ti-e</i>	Say to Suti'u:
<i>qí-bi-ma</i>	
<i>um-ma</i> ^{md3()} <i>mu</i> ŠIG ₅ - <i>ma</i>	thus says Šîn-mudammiq:
2 BÁN <i>še-am</i>	Give two <i>sūtu</i> -units of barley and one sack of straw to Nabar-utti.
1 <i>a-za-i-la</i> <i>ša</i> IN.NU	
<i>a-na</i> ^m <i>Na-bar-ut-ti</i>	
<i>di-in</i>	
<i>iš-tu am-ma-ka</i>	As soon as he returns from there,
<i>i+na tu-a-ri</i>	
<i>še-am</i> ù IN.NU	give the barley and straw to his horses.
<i>a-na</i> ANŠE.KUR.RA.MEŠ- <i>šu</i>	
<i>di-in</i>	
UD-10-KÁM	(On) the 10th day (of the month).

The royal inscriptions, written on stone slabs, clay cones, tablets, and prisms, record building enterprises and military conquests from the Assyrian kings' point of view. From the reign of Aššur-uballiṭ I onwards, royal inscriptions become more numerous, especially under Adad-nirari I (1295–1264 [1305–1274]), Shalmaneser I (1263–1234 [1273–1244]), and Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233–1197 [1243–1207]).

Most of the literary compositions from the Middle Assyrian library M2 in Ashur date to Tiglath-pileser I's time (Pedersén 1985: 31–42). The collection consists mainly of literary tablets in Standard Babylonian language and Middle Assyrian script, including lexical lists, bilingual texts, hymns, myths, incantations, omens, horse-training instructions, and perfume texts; however, a few tablets in Middle Babylonian script are present as well. The more "official" documents, copies of the so-called Middle Assyrian Laws and Palace Decrees and the Assyrian coronation ritual, were composed in the Middle Assyrian language.

Neo-Assyrian

The shift from Middle Assyrian to Neo-Assyrian appears to have been

gradual: the 11th century legal documents from Giricano (Dunnu-ša-Uzibi) and the royal inscriptions of Aššur-ketti-lešir, a vassal of Tiglath-pileser I, already show clear Neo-Assyrian characteristics, both in their grammar and their lexicon (Radner 2004: 53–4). By ca. 930, Middle Assyrian had been entirely replaced by Neo-Assyrian, which survives in the form of a rich textual corpus preserved on thousands of clay tablets. There is evidence that perishable materials such as papyri, leather, and writing boards were used with some frequency as well, but with the exception of a few examples of the latter, they have left no archaeological traces.

The Assyrian capital cities, Ashur, Kal^hbu, Dur-Šarrukin, and, especially, Nineveh, have yielded archives and libraries that belonged to palaces, temples, and private families. Archives were also found in other cities in the Assyrian heartland, in Syria, and in Babylonia, and a library was found in H^uuzirina (Sultantepe). The distinction between archives and libraries is not a strict one and archival documents and library tablets were often kept in the same room.

The Neo-Assyrian libraries contained religious, literary and scholarly texts, including incantations, omens, hymns and prayers, medical texts, lexical lists, epics, and myths. Most of the compositions were first-millennium copies of Standard Babylonian originals, occasionally interspersed with Assyrianisms, but Sumerian and bilingual texts were copied as well. A small sample of court poetry was created in more or less pure Neo-Assyrian, “with elements from the colloquial or folk tradition” (Livingstone 1989: xvi; see also [Chapter 19](#)).

The archival materials from the Neo-Assyrian period comprise mainly letters, legal and administrative documents, queries to the sun-god, and reports on ominous events. They were written in Neo-Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian, and sometimes quoted Standard Babylonian reference works. The royal correspondence that is preserved sheds light on the political interaction between the king and his governors and political agents, particularly during the reigns of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727) and Sargon II (721–705), and on the influence of scholars and priests on the kings Esarhaddon (680–669) and Assurbanipal (668–631). Queries and extispicy reports (SAA 4) concern the enemy’s plans, the loyalty of officials, and illness in the royal family, among other matters. Reports that interpret celestial observations, abnormal births, fortuitous events, and auspicious days are also well attested (SAA 8).

The following Neo-Assyrian letter sent to Tiglath-pileser III illustrates how high officials communicated with their royal masters ([Figure 17.1](#)).

Text 3 A Neo-Assyrian letter (ND 2703 = SAA 19 114; cf. Saggs 2001: 232)

<i>a-na</i> LUGAL EN- <i>ia</i>	To the king, my lord:
ARAD- <i>ka</i> ^m <i>a-ši-pa-a</i>	your servant Ašipâ.
<i>lu-u</i> DIMU <i>a-na</i> LUGAL	Good health to the king, my lord!
EN- <i>ia</i>	
LÚ*.NINDA <i>ša</i> MUNUS. <i>ša-kín-te</i>	The baker of the <i>šakintu</i> (a high female official) came and told me:
<i>i-tal-ka</i> ∴ <i>iq-ṭí-bi-a</i>	“A scepter, a chest, an iron brazier, and a copper kettle have been stolen from the palace and sold for money.”
<i>ma-a</i> GIŠ.PA	
GIŠ. <i>tup-ni-nu</i>	
<i>ka-nu-nu</i> AN.BAR <i>a-sa-lu</i>	
URUDU	
<i>ša</i> É.GAL ∴ <i>ša-ar-qu</i>	
<i>ina kás-pi ta-da-nu</i>	
<i>a-sa-ap-ra</i>	I sent (word) and those who sold the iron brazier for money were arrested.
<i>hé-et</i> ∴ <i>ka-nu-nu</i> AN.BAR	
<i>ina kás-pi ta-di-nu-nu</i>	
<i>i-Š</i> <i>a-ab-tú</i>	
LÚ*. <i>ba-te-qu</i>	I am herewith sending the informer to the king, my lord.
<i>a-na</i> UGU LUGAL	
EN- <i>ia</i> <i>a-sa-ap-ra</i>	
LUGAL EN liš-’a-al-šú	Let the king, (my) lord, question him.

The earlier practice of celebrating building projects and military achievements lived on during the Neo-Assyrian period. The numerous royal inscriptions of this age are mostly written in Neo-Assyrian script, but in Standard Babylonian language, punctuated by occasional “Assyrianisms.” Treaties concluded between Neo-Assyrian kings and foreign rulers survive as well (SAA 2). One example is Esarhaddon’s succession treaty (SAA 2 6), which is largely written in the Neo-Assyrian language, although some Babylonian forms, words, and idioms appear, and even a number of hybrid Assyro-Babylonian forms (Watanabe 1987: 43–4).

The number of Assyrian cuneiform sources diminishes considerably during the late reign of Assurbanipal, probably at least in part due to the increasing use of papyri and leather scrolls written in Aramaic. Tablets from the provincial capital Dur-Katlimmu, however, prove that Assyrian cuneiform did not fall out of use immediately after the destruction of Nineveh in 612.

Aramaic

The spread of Aramaic in the Assyrian heartland was facilitated by the growing population of Aramaeans within the territory of the state. Aramaean tribes had already played a significant role in the crisis at the end of the Middle Assyrian period. With the mass deportations of mainly Aramaic-speaking peoples under Assyrian kings from the ninth century BCE onwards, the gradual Aramaization of Mesopotamia gained in speed (Tadmor 1982). Aramaic became the new lingua franca of the empire, while Assyrian remained the language of the political elite. From that point onward, Aramaic and its various dialects remained the vernacular for successive empires, most prominently in the form of the “Imperial Aramaic” dialect used during the Achaemenid Empire.

The relationship between Assyrian and Aramaic in the first millennium is complex. Sargon II’s rejection of Aramaic as an official language fit for royal correspondence may be deduced from his often-quoted reply to an official in Ur, in southern Babylonia, who wanted to write to the king in Aramaic:

Why would you not write and send me messages in Akkadian? Really, the message which you write must be drawn up in this very manner – this is a fixed regulation!

(SAA 17 2: 17–22)

On the other hand, clear proof of the official recognition of the Aramaic language comes from a set of bilingual lion-weights of Shalmaneser V and other Assyrian kings; these objects carry short inscriptions both in Akkadian and in Aramaic. However, the recognition seems to be based on a “double standard,” since the Akkadian inscriptions mostly say “n *mina*-unit(s) of the king,” whereas the Aramaic ones read “n *mina*-unit(s) of the land.” Late Assyrian palace reliefs from Tiglath-pileser III’s reign until Assurbanipal’s also illustrate the increasing need for writing in Aramaic: Assyrian and Aramaic scribes were regularly represented side by side, with the former writing Assyrian cuneiform on their clay tablets, while the latter wrote onto scrolls, most likely using the Aramaic alphabet (Figure 17.2). The textual evidence for Aramaic scribes at Assyria’s court confirms this development.



Figure 17.2 Assyrian and Aramaic scribes as depicted on a Neo-Assyrian relief.

Source: Reproduced with permission of T. Lipasti.

As already pointed out, most Aramaic inscriptions from the Neo-Assyrian period are unfortunately lost because they were written on perishable materials (papyrus and leather). But Aramaic alphabetic epigraphs scratched on clay tablets of a mainly legal nature have been found throughout the Neo-Assyrian Empire (Fales 1986, 2007: 99–102; [Figure 17.3](#)). Aramaic writing is also preserved on some stone stelae, seals, metal objects, ivory, and pot shards (ostraca), but Aramaic characters painted in ink survive only rarely. Truly bilingual Akkadian-Aramaic celebrative inscriptions on stone, which display more or less the same text in two languages, seem to be attested only during

the early part of the Neo-Assyrian period (Fales 2007: 106).

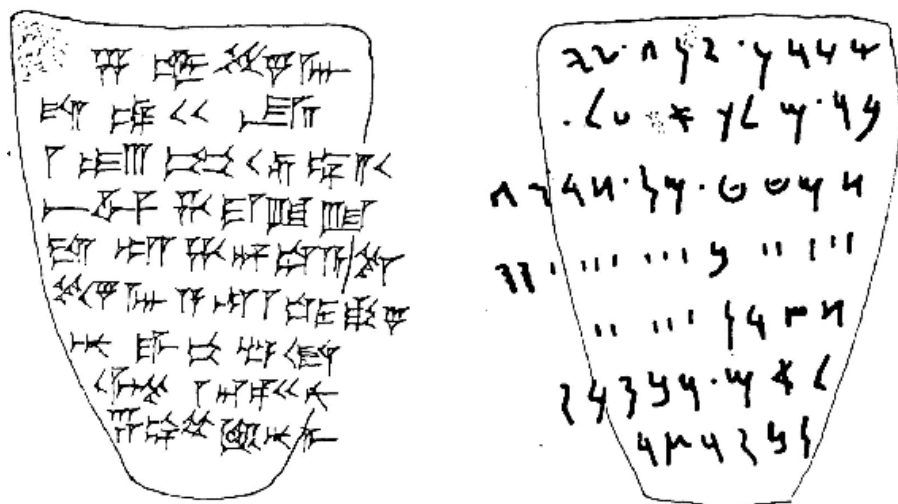


Figure 17.3 Assyrian-Aramaic triangular corn-loan docket (after Fales 1986, fig. 3).

Other languages

During their long history, the Assyrians came in contact with speakers of many different languages, several of which are known almost exclusively from personal names in Assyrian sources. In the Old Assyrian period, when Assyrian merchants were active in Anatolia, their foreign contacts are reflected in the hundreds of non-Assyrian names that are mentioned in the extant documents, the names originating from the Neshite (or Proto-Hittite), Luwian, Hurrian, and (Proto-)Hattic languages. The Assyrian king Šamši-Adad I was himself of Amorite origin. During the second half of the second millennium, Babylonian was the *lingua franca* of the Middle East, while a Kassite dynasty ruled over Babylonia; Assyria annexed large Hurrian-speaking areas and was in regular contact with Indo-European Hittites and Luwians living in **H**atti. In the Neo-Assyrian period, Assyria confronted – and interacted with – Subria and Urartu in the north, Mannea in the east, Elam in the southeast, Babylonia in the south, and Syro-Palestine (where West Semitic languages such as Ugaritic, Phoenician, Moabite, and Edomite were spoken), Egypt, and the Eastern Mediterranean in the west. All these regions had their own distinct languages.

Because of this multilingual environment, many loan words entered Assyrian, and, conversely, many Assyrian words were absorbed by foreign languages. Surprisingly, however, the word *targumānu(m)* “interpreter, translator, dragoman” is rarely mentioned in Assyrian sources (von Soden 1989: 353–4),

although interpreters were certainly necessary and enjoyed official recognition. The problem of understanding the languages of distant countries was sometimes treated in official sources, as in an (unfortunately broken) account from Assurbanipal's annals concerning a messenger of the Lydian king Gyges arriving in Nineveh, where no one could understand him (Borger 1996: 182, 218). Interpreters are never mentioned in contexts in which Assyrians were communicating with speakers of other Semitic languages, i.e., with Babylonians or West Semites; they are only attested when the Assyrians were dealing with people of Anatolian, Hurrian, Šubrian, Urartian, or Mannaeian origin. Assyrian libraries have yielded large numbers of Sumerian-Akkadian bilingual texts, reflecting the important role Sumerian played in religion and scholarship, but there are also a few multilingual tablets that include words from other languages (Elamite, Lullubian, etc.).

Writing Systems

Cuneiform, probably invented by Sumerians in the mid-fourth millennium BCE, was the writing system par excellence in the Near East for millennia. Cuneiform signs were produced by impressing a reed stylus on damp clay to make distinctive intelligible patterns, which the educated could read. Cuneiform writing was widely borrowed and adapted by speakers of the various languages in the region. Not restricted to clay, cuneiform was also written on stone, metal, wax-covered writing boards, and other materials. The most prominent use of cuneiform writing for a language other than Sumerian was for Akkadian, which comprises both Assyrian and Babylonian dialects.

Akkadian cuneiform is a logo-syllabic script based on its Sumerian predecessor and written from left to right. A word sign (or logogram) is a sign that represents an entire word; it is usually transliterated in modern scholarship in non-italicized, small capital letters. A syllabic sign is a sign that stands for a syllable of the type V, CV, VC, or CVC (with V designating a vowel and C a consonant); these are normally transliterated in italics. Akkadian cuneiform is both homophonic and polyphonic, i.e., different signs can have the same phonetic value (distinguished in transliteration with an accent or an index number, e.g., *il*, *īl* = *il*₂, *īl* = *il*₃, *il*₄, *il*₅), and a sign can

have multiple logographic and/or syllabic readings (e.g., the sign , can have the logographic values DINGIR = *ilu(m)* “god” and AN = OA *šamā'um*, MA *šamā'u*, NA *šamê* (pl.) “heaven,” as well as the syllabic values *an* and *il*). The use of polyvalent signs introduces the possibility of ambiguity, making the correct reading of each sign dependent on the context. Modern sign lists register cuneiform signs with both their respective logographic and syllabic readings.

Fortunately, for a particular period and area, the homophony and polyphony of cuneiform signs is limited. Moreover, the Akkadian writing system includes mechanisms, such as determinatives and phonetic complements, that help modern scholars choose the intended reading. The determinatives originate from logograms and indicate the class or category to which the following or preceding noun belongs. In Neo-Assyrian, the most common determinatives are LÚ before a profession or gentilic, the so-called *Personenkeil*^m before male personal names, and the determinative ^d before divine names. Phonetic complements, on the other hand, are syllabic signs that usually repeat the last (or more rarely the first) syllable of a word rendered by a logogram, thus directing the reader to the word's correct reading (e.g., the sign *mu* in DI^{mu} tells us that DI has to be read as *šulmu*). Determinatives and phonetic complements are optional devices that are dependent on the time of writing (the *Personenkeil* is rare in Old Assyrian, but is used systematically in Neo-Assyrian) or the whims of the scribe.

During Assyria's history, the use of cuneiform underwent drastic changes. Old Assyrian cuneiform, mainly known from documents owned by private individuals, is simple: the number of signs is small and the use of logograms and determinatives limited. Literacy was probably high during this period. Middle Assyrian and, especially, Neo-Assyrian cuneiform are more complex. The scholarly tablets, in particular, which were written by a small group of highly educated specialists, used an extensive repertoire of cuneiform signs and values, so that lesser-educated scribes might have struggled to interpret these learned texts.

Similar to cuneiform in terms of difficulty and learnedness are the hieroglyphic scripts that were used in the ancient Near East, not only for Egyptian, but also for Luwian. Many foreigners familiar with hieroglyphic writing lived in the Assyrian heartland in the Neo-Assyrian period. Especially the knowledge of Egyptian scribes and ritual experts was highly valued at Nineveh's court in the seventh century. Even though hieroglyphic texts are rarely discovered in Assyria, because their mostly perishable writing materials are now lost, a certain Assyrian fascination with hieroglyphs can be gauged from the so-called Assyrian hieroglyphs, which are iconographic representations of Sargon's and Esarhaddon's royal titles (Finkel and Reade 1996).

In contrast to the complicated writing systems of Akkadian and Egyptian, Aramaic was rarely written in cuneiform or hieroglyphs; it was, instead, recorded in a consonantal alphabetic script. Following the invention of the alphabet in Canaan in the second millennium BCE, various alphabetic scripts appeared in the Levant, such as Phoenician and Ugaritic. These scripts had one character for each consonant of the language, requiring fewer than thirty signs. Yet despite their economy, alphabetic scripts spread slowly in the ancient Near East – until Aramaic gained prominence. In the 11th or 10th

century, the Aramaeans adopted and further developed the Phoenician alphabet with its linear letter forms and right-to-left direction. With only twenty-two signs, the Old Aramaic script is simple; however, the Aramaic language had more than twenty-two consonantal sounds and, hence, some signs had to represent more than one sound. Moreover, the Aramaic alphabet, like the Phoenician and Ugaritic ones, only represents consonants. Vowels are not systematically indicated, “restricting knowledge of patterns of vowels and stress to some extent” (Millard 2007: 86) and causing interpretive challenges for the modern translator. Regardless, with the increasing Aramaization of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the Aramaic script became more and more common and probably displaced cuneiform as the dominant writing system shortly before the empire collapsed.

Main Features of Assyrian Grammar

In this section, we focus on the main features of the Assyrian dialect and some of the changes that occurred between Old, Middle, and Neo-Assyrian. It should be noted that our knowledge of Assyrian will improve in the near future as grammars of Old Assyrian, Middle Assyrian, and Neo-Assyrian are presently in preparation. Recent overviews of the related Babylonian dialects are listed in the section on Further Reading.

Phonology

Since Assyrian is an extinct language, we can only approximately reconstruct how the native Assyrians actually spoke. For Akkadian in general, the estimated pronunciation is based on the cuneiform orthography and on the knowledge of cognate languages such as Aramaic, Arabic, and Biblical Hebrew. In comparison to the original twenty-nine proto-Semitic consonants, the number of consonants in Akkadian is greatly reduced, probably due to the influence of Sumerian. In alphabetical order, the twenty consonants of Akkadian are: *ʾ, b, d, g, ḥ, j (y), k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, š, t, ʔ, w, z*. The approximated pronunciation of *ḥ* is “ch” as in Scottish “loch,” and the emphatic consonants *q* (qoph), *š* (šade), and *ʔ* (ʔeth) were glottalized (as in Ethiopian and South Arabic; Kouwenberg 2003). In the Akkadian cuneiform system, signs ending in a labial, dental or velar stop or in a sibilant (except *t/š*) did not distinguish between voiced, voiceless, and emphatic. The aleph (*ʾ*) represents the glottal stop. The consonants *w* and *j (y)* are still pronounced in OA, but in MA, word-initial *w* mostly disappears (although initial *wa-* becomes *u-*); intervocalic *w* within a word appears mostly as *b* (*awātum* >

				nom.	obl.	acc./ gen.	dat.	obl.
Singular	1c.	I		<i>anāku</i>		<i>yāti</i>	<i>*yāti</i>	<i>yāši</i> (a) <i>yāši</i>
	2m.	you		<i>atta</i>		<i>ku(w)āti</i>	<i>*kuāti</i>	<i>kuāša</i> <i>kāša</i>
	2f.	you		<i>atti</i>		<i>kuāši</i>	<i>*kāši</i>	
	3m.	he	<i>šūt</i>		<i>šû, šutu</i>	<i>šu(w)āti</i>	<i>*šuāti/u</i>	<i>šuāšu</i> <i>šāšu</i>
Plural	3f.	she	<i>šīt</i>		<i>ši, šiti</i>	<i>šiāti</i>	<i>šiāti/u</i>	<i>šuāša</i> <i>šāša</i>
	1c.	we	<i>nēnu</i>		<i>anēnu</i>	<i>*niāti</i>	<i>*niāti</i>	<i>nāši</i> <i>nāši</i>
	2m.	you		<i>attunu</i>		<i>kunūti</i>	<i>*kunāti</i>	<i>kunāšunu</i> , <i>kāšunu</i>
	2f.	you	<i>attina</i> (only attested in OA)	<i>kināti</i>	<i>*kināti</i>	<i>kināšunu</i>	<i>*ka/</i> <i>ināšina</i>	
	3m.	they		<i>šunu</i>		<i>šunūti</i>	<i>šunāti</i>	<i>šunāšunu</i> , <i>šāšunu</i>
	3f.	they		<i>šina</i>		<i>šināti</i>	<i>šinātina</i>	<i>*šināšinu</i> <i>kināšina</i>

Whereas OA has only one form for the oblique case of independent personal pronouns, MA has separate forms for the accusative/genitive and the dative. By the Neo-Assyrian period, the archaic accusative/genitive forms disappear.

Independent possessive pronouns are frequent in OA but less so in MA/NA. They may be used as attributes or independently and are declined as adjectives (Table 17.2).

Table 17.2 Independent possessive pronouns

			OA	MA	NA
Singular	1	mine	<i>yā'um</i>	<i>yā'u</i>	<i>iyû</i>
	2	yours	<i>ku(w)ā'um</i>	<i>ku'ā'u</i>	<i>ikkû</i>
	3	his/hers/its	<i>šu(w)ā'um</i> (m.), <i>šiā'um</i> (f.)	<i>*šu'ā'u</i>	<i>*iššû</i>
Plural	1	ours	<i>nī'ā'um</i>	<i>*nī'ā'u</i>	<i>innû</i>
	2	yours	<i>kunū'um</i>	<i>kunā'u</i>	<i>ikkanû</i>
	3	theirs	<i>šunu'um</i>	<i>*šunā'u</i>	<i>iššanû</i>

Yet even in OA, possession is mostly denoted by pronominal suffixes attached to nouns. Added to verbs, pronominal suffixes may indicate direct or indirect objects (Table 17.3).

Table 17.3 Pronominal suffixes

	Nouns	Verbs
	Posses.	Direct Indirect
	Direct object	Direct object &

**indirect
object**

		<i>OA</i>	<i>MA</i>	<i>NA</i>	<i>OA</i>	<i>MA</i>	<i>OA</i>	<i>MA</i>	<i>NA</i>
Singular	1c.	- <i>īlē</i> , - <i>ya</i>	- <i>ī</i> , - <i>ya</i>	- <i>ī</i> , -(y) <i>a</i>	- <i>īlē</i> , - <i>nī</i>	- <i>nī</i>	-(<i>a</i>) <i>m</i> , - <i>nīm</i>	-(<i>a</i>) <i>m</i> , - <i>ne(m)</i>	-(<i>ak</i>) <i>nī</i>
	2m.	- <i>ka</i>	- <i>ka</i>	- <i>ka</i>	- <i>ka</i>	- <i>ka</i>	- <i>kum</i>	- <i>ku</i>	-(<i>ak</i>) <i>ka</i>
	2f.	- <i>ki</i>	- <i>ki</i>	- <i>ki</i>	- <i>ki</i>	- <i>ki</i>	- <i>kim</i>	- <i>ki</i>	-(<i>ak</i>) <i>ki</i>
	3m.	- <i>šu</i>	- <i>šu</i>	- <i>šu</i>	- <i>š(u)</i>	- <i>š(u)</i>	- <i>šum</i>	- <i>šu(m)</i>	-(<i>aš</i>) <i>šu</i>
	3f.	- <i>ša</i>	- <i>ša</i>	- <i>ša</i>	- <i>š(i)</i>	- <i>š(i)</i>	- <i>šim</i>	- <i>ši/e(m)</i>	-(<i>aš</i>) <i>ši</i>
Plural	1c.	- <i>nī</i>	- <i>nī</i>	- <i>nī</i>	- <i>nī</i> <i>āti</i>	- <i>nāši(n)</i>	- <i>nī</i> <i>āti</i>	- <i>nāši(n)</i>	-(<i>an</i>) <i>nāši</i>
	2m.	- <i>k(u)nu</i>	- <i>kunu</i>	- <i>kunu</i>	- <i>kunu</i>	- <i>kunu</i>	- <i>kunūti</i>	- <i>kunu</i>	-(<i>ak</i>) <i>kunu</i>
	2f.		- <i>kina</i>	- <i>kina</i>	- <i>kina</i>	- <i>kina</i>	- <i>kināti</i>	- <i>kina</i>	-(<i>ak</i>) <i>kina</i>
	3m.	- <i>š(u)nu</i>	- <i>šunu</i>	- <i>šunu</i>	- <i>šunu</i>	- <i>šunu</i>	- <i>šunūti</i>	- <i>šunu</i>	-(<i>aš</i>) <i>šunu</i>
	3f.	- <i>š(i)na</i>	- <i>šina</i>	- <i>šina</i>	- <i>šina</i>	- <i>šina</i>	- <i>šināti</i>	- <i>šina</i>	-(<i>aš</i>) <i>šina</i>

The demonstrative pronoun “this” is *annium* (OA), *anniu* (MA), and (*h*)*anniu* (NA); “that” is *ammium* (OA) and *ammiu* (MA/NA); OA also has *allium* “that” (for the distinctive uses, see Kouwenberg 2012). Their declension follows that of adjectives.

The determinative pronoun is *ša*. It is generally indeclinable in Assyrian. The determinative *ša* is followed by a genitive and often used as “the one of” to form compound words (e.g., *ša-pān-ēkalli*, “palace supervisor,” lit. “the one before the palace”), as “of” in periphrases of the construct state (e.g., *ma-šartu ša šarri* “the guard of the king”), or adverbially (e.g., *ša-šērāti* “in the morning”). *ša* also functions as the relative pronoun “who(m), which, that, what,” introducing relative clauses.

Mannu(m) “who?” and *mīnu(m)* “what?” are the interrogative pronouns. They are declined for case, but do not have feminine or plural forms. In addition, the interrogative adjective *ayyum* (OA), *ayyu* (MA/NA) “which?, what?” agrees in case, gender, and number with the word to which it refers. The indefinite pronouns are *mamman(a)* (OA), *mamma* (MA), *memmēni* (NA) “anybody,” and *mimma* (OA/MA), *memmēni* (NA) “anything;” when negated these stand for “nobody” and “nothing.” The indefinite collective pronoun is (*am*)*mala* (OA), *ammar* (MA), (*am*)*mar* (*ša*) (NA) “all that; everyone who.” The noun *ramunu* “(one)self” with pronominal suffixes is used as a reflexive pronoun, e.g., *ana raminišū* “for himself.”

Nouns

The Akkadian nouns are marked for gender, number, and case (Table 17.4).

Table 17.4 Noun declension

	Masculine			Feminine		
	OA	MA	NA	OA	MA	NA
Singular						
nom.	-um	-u	-u -u	-(u)tu(m)	-(u)tu	-(u)tu- (u)tu
Acc.	-am	-a	-(a)ta(m)	-(a)ta		
Gen.	-im	-e/i	-i	-(i)ti(m)	-(e/i)te	-(i)ti
Plural						
nom.	-ū	-ū	-āni, -āti, - ūti, -ī/ē	-ātum	-ātu	-āti
Obl.	-ē	-ē/i	-ātīm	-āti		

Gender

Akkadian has two genders: masculine and feminine. Most feminine nouns are marked with the allomorph $-(a)t$ (e.g., $bēltu(m)$ “lady,” $šarrutu(m)$ “queen”), while most unmarked nouns are masculine (e.g., $bēlu(m)$ “lord,” $šarru(m)$ “king”). However, there are some common exceptions to this rule, such as the unmarked feminine word *ummu* “mother.”

Number

There are three numbers in Akkadian: singular, dual, and plural. The dual is still active in OA but is mainly limited to nouns signifying body parts in MA/NA, such as MA $ēnāšu$ “his eyes (acc.)” and NA $emūqāya$ “my strength (obl.),” while plural forms otherwise replace the dual.

The plural forms of *abu(m)* “father” and $aḫu(m)$ “brother” are formed with consonant reduplication: $abbā'ūlē$ (OA/MA), $abbē$ (NA) and $aḫḫūlē$. In NA, the nominal plural formation changes and the older masculine plurals in $-ē$ are often replaced with plurals ending in $-āni$, $-āti$ and $-ūti$. The plural forms of many common nouns remain difficult to determine since these nouns are regularly written with logograms.

There is no definite or indefinite article in Akkadian.

Cases

Akkadian has three cases: nominative, accusative, and genitive. Generally, the

nominative identifies the subject of a verb or nominal clause, the accusative marks the direct object of a verb, and the genitive is used after a preposition or in relation to another noun in order to indicate possession, agent, or object of action. In plural and dual forms, the accusative and genitive are combined into a single case, called the oblique case.

Over time, the Assyrian cases underwent changes: mimation (final *-m*) and nunation (dual final *-n*) of most case endings disappeared after OA. Moreover, in NA, the nominative and accusative singular merged into one case, which may have been due to Aramaic influence. For stress or clarity, the preposition *ana* is sometimes used as a *nota accusativi* and some verbs regularly mark their object with *ana*, e.g., *ana PN ša’ālu* “to ask PN.” The oblique plural is also used for the nominative. The genitive is rarely used to denote possession in the late period; it is mainly employed after prepositions and in compounds.

States

Akkadian has three states, often referred to by their Latin names: the *status rectus*, *status absolutus*, and *status constructus*. The *status rectus*, or, “governed state,” refers to the basic forms of nouns that are not followed by a genitive or a relative clause. The *status absolutus*, or, “absolute state,” is the nominal form without any case endings; it is used for cardinal numbers, in expressions of measurements, and in fixed adverbial expressions. The *status constructus*, the “construct state” or “bound form,” is the shortest phonetically possible form of the noun; it is widely used when a noun is followed by a genitive (e.g., *kalab šarri(m)* “king’s dog”) or by a pronominal suffix (e.g., *miharšu* “his equal”). Alternatively, the *status constructus* can be replaced by the *status rectus* and the relative pronoun *ša* followed by a genitive (e.g., *kalbu(m) ša šarri(m)*) or a relative clause (e.g., *dibbī ša šarru išpuranni* “the words that the king wrote me”). In NA, the latter constructions were preferred and the use of the *status constructus* became more restricted.

Adjectives

Most Akkadian adjectives are derived from verbs (see verbal adjectives). They normally follow the nouns they modify, agreeing with them in case, gender, and number. Their declension is similar to that of nouns with the exception of the masculine plural endings, as seen in [Table 17.5](#).

Table 17.5 Adjectival declension

<i>Masculine plural</i>	<i>OA</i>	<i>MA</i>	<i>NA</i>
nom.	<i>-uttum</i>	<i>-uttu, -ūtu</i>	<i>-ūti</i>
Obl.	<i>-uttim</i>	<i>-utte, -ūte</i>	

Verbs

As noted above, most Akkadian verbs have three-consonantal roots, such as *šapāru(m)* “to send” with its root *š-p-r*, although some quadriliteral verbal roots exist (e.g., *nabalkutu(m)* “to rebel” and *šuka*”*unum* (OA), **šuka*”*unu* (MA), *šukênu* (NA) “to prostrate oneself”). Verbs are further classified as “strong” or “weak” depending on the absence or presence of one or more weak radicals (*ʿ*, *j* (*y*), *n*, and *w*), whose presence induces phonetic modifications. For reasons of brevity, we will discuss here only strong, three-consonantal verbs, notwithstanding the fact that some very common verbs are weak or irregular (e.g., *alāku(m)* “to go,” *tadānu(m)* “to give,” and *wabālum* (OA), *ubālu* (MA/NA) “to bring”), as an introduction to the verbal stems.

The basic verbal stem is the G-stem (from the German *Grundstamm* “basic stem”). By means of prefixes and modifications to the verbal root, other stems can be formed whose meanings may be derived from the basic meaning of the G-stem. These derived stems are the D-, Š-, and N-stems. As with the G-stem, the conjugated forms in these stems are built around a base, which is particular for each tense, with the addition of prefixes and suffixes to mark the person, gender, and number. For present, preterite, and perfect forms, these prefixes and suffixes are (Table 17.6):

Table 17.6 Verbal prefixes and suffixes (long final vowels are used in OA/MA; in NA, however, these are shortened)

	<i>G and N stem</i>	<i>D and Š stem</i>
Singular		
3m.	<i>i-</i> BASE	<i>u-</i> BASE
3f./2m.	<i>tā-</i> BASE	<i>tū-</i> BASE
2f.	<i>tā-</i> BASE- <i>ī/i</i>	<i>tū-</i> BASE- <i>ī/i</i>
1c.	<i>a-</i> BASE	<i>u-</i> BASE
Plural		
3m.	<i>i-</i> BASE- <i>ū/u</i>	<i>u-</i> BASE- <i>ū/u</i>
3f.	<i>i-</i> BASE- <i>ā/a</i>	<i>u-</i> BASE- <i>ā/a</i>
2c.	<i>tā-</i> BASE- <i>ā/a</i>	<i>tū-</i> BASE- <i>ā/a</i>
1c.	<i>ni-</i> BASE	<i>nu-</i> BASE

Finite tenses

The Akkadian verbal system distinguishes five finite tenses (alternatively, aspects): the present, preterite, perfect, imperative, and stative (cf. Kouwenberg 2000). The present, or durative, describes concurrent or future actions and processes, and is often translated with the English present or future. It is characterized by the doubling of the middle radical (e.g., *i-šappar*

“he sends/will send”). The preterite is used to express punctual, completed actions and mostly corresponds to the English simple past (e.g., *i-špur* “he sent”). In MA/NA the preterite was replaced by the perfect in the main clause and was only regularly used in negative main clauses, subordinate sentences, and questions with an interrogative word. In late NA legal documents, however, the archaizing preterite reappears for the positive past tense (Postgate 1997: 162–3). The perfect denotes past actions in positive main clauses and in questions without an interrogative word, and corresponds roughly to the English present perfect. It has an infix *-t(a)-* after the first root radical (e.g., *i-štapar* “he has sent”). Lastly, the imperative is used for positive commands (e.g., *šupur* “send!”) and the stative expresses a state or situation in the past, present, or future.

The vowels in the verbal bases depend on the class to which the verb belongs. Five verbal classes can be distinguished, namely the *a/u*, *a/a*, *a/i*, *u/u*, and *i/i* classes – the first vowel is the vowel before the third radical in the G present and the second vowel is the vowel before the third radical in the G preterite (Table 17.7).

Table 17.7 Verbal classes

<i>Class</i>	<i>Examples</i>	<i>G present</i>	<i>G preterite</i>
<i>a/u</i>	<i>šapāru(m)</i> “send”	<i>išappar</i>	<i>išpur</i>
<i>a/a</i>	<i>šabātu(m)</i> “seize”	<i>išabbat</i>	<i>išbat</i>
<i>a/i</i>	<i>alāku(m)</i> “to go”	<i>illak</i>	<i>illik</i>
<i>u/u</i>	<i>dabābu(m)</i> “to speak”	<i>idabbub</i>	<i>idbub</i>
<i>i/i</i>	<i>paqādu(m)</i> “to appoint”	<i>ipaqqid</i>	<i>ipqid</i>

The paradigm for finite tenses in the G-stem (*a/u* class) is shown in Table 17.8.

Table 17.8 Finite forms in the basic or G-stem

<i>šapāru(m)</i>	<i>Present</i>	<i>Perfect</i>	<i>Preterite</i>	<i>Imperative</i>
Singular				
3m.	<i>išappar</i>	OA: <i>ištapar</i> MA: <i>iltapar</i> NA: <i>issapar</i>	<i>išpur</i>	-
3f./2m.	<i>tašappar</i>	OA: <i>taštapar</i> MA: <i>taltapar</i> NA: <i>tassapar</i>	<i>tašpur</i>	-/šupur
2f.	OA/MA: <i>tašappirī</i> NA: <i>tašappiri</i>	OA: <i>taštāprī</i> MA: <i>taltāprī</i> NA: <i>tassapri</i>	OA/MA: <i>tašpurī</i> NA: <i>tašpuri</i>	OA/MA: <i>šuprī</i> NA: <i>šupri</i>
1c.	<i>ašappar</i>	OA: <i>aštapar</i>	<i>ašpur</i>	-

		MA: <i>altapar</i> NA: <i>assapar</i>		
Plural				
3m.	OA/MA: <i>išappurū</i> NA: <i>išappuru</i>	OA: <i>ištaprū</i> MA: <i>iltaprū</i> NA: <i>issapru</i>	OA/MA: <i>išpurū</i> NA: <i>išpuru</i>	-
3f.	OA/MA: <i>išapparā</i> NA: <i>išappara</i>	OA: <i>ištaprā</i> MA: <i>iltaprā</i> NA: <i>issapra</i>	OA/MA: <i>išpurā</i> NA: <i>išpura</i>	-
2c.	OA/MA: <i>tašapparā</i> NA: <i>tašappara</i>	OA: <i>taštaprā</i> MA: <i>taltaprā</i> NA: <i>tassapra</i>	OA/MA: <i>tašpurā</i> NA: <i>tašpura</i>	OA/MA: <i>šuprā</i> NA: <i>šupra</i>
1c.	<i>nišappar</i>	OA: <i>ništapar</i> MA: <i>niltapar</i> NA: <i>nissapar</i>	<i>nišpur</i>	-

Three things stand out when examining Table 17.8 with regards to phonetic changes. First, the consonant cluster *št* underwent different phonetic changes in the three stages of Assyrian: in OA, both consonants remain unchanged; in MA, *št* assimilates to *lt*, and, by the Neo-Assyrian period, *št* assimilates through *lt* to *ss*. Second, Assyrian vowel assimilation can be observed in the present second feminine singular and third masculine plural where the short *a* of the penultimate open, unaccented syllable is assimilated to the vowel of the following syllable. Third, the long plural endings of the second feminine singular and the second and third person plural are shortened in NA (Hämeen-Anttila 2000: 29, 32–3).

Commands and requests

Additional moods are formed with either the preterite or the present tense. The so-called precative is used to express polite requests or indirect commands in the first and third person, and complements the second person imperatives. The precative is formed by the proclitic particle *lū* and the preterite, with *lū* being contracted in case the preterite forms begin with a vowel. In NA, exhortation in the first person plural (i.e., the cohortative) is expressed by a morphological preterite instead of the precative (Table 17.9).

Table 17.9 Commands and requests

	<i>Positive commands and requests</i>	<i>Negative commands and requests</i>		
	<i>Imperative</i>	<i>Precative</i>	<i>Prohibitive</i>	<i>Vetitive</i>
Singular				
3m.		<i>lišpur</i>	OA: <i>lā išappar</i>	OA: <i>ē išpur</i>

			MA/NA: (lū) <i>lā išappār</i>	
3f.		<i>lū tašpur</i>	OA: <i>lā</i> <i>tašappār</i> MA/NA: (lū) <i>lā tašappār</i>	OA: <i>ē tašpur</i>
2m.	<i>šupur</i>		OA: <i>lā</i> <i>tašappār</i> MA/NA: (lū) <i>lā tašappār</i>	OA: <i>ē tašpur</i>
2f.	OA/MA: <i>šuprī</i> NA: <i>šupri</i>		OA: <i>lā</i> <i>tašappirī</i> MA/NA: (lū) <i>lā tašappirī/i</i>	OA: <i>ē tašpurī</i>
1c.		<i>lašpur</i>	OA: <i>lā ašappār</i> MA/NA: (lū) <i>lā ašappār</i>	OA: <i>ē ašpur</i>
Plural				
3m.		OA/MA: <i>lišpurū</i> NA: <i>lišpuru</i>	OA: <i>lā</i> <i>išappurū</i> MA/NA: (lū) <i>lā išappurū/u</i>	OA: <i>ē išpurū</i>
3f.		OA/MA: <i>lišpurā</i> NA: <i>lišpura</i>	OA: <i>lā</i> <i>išapparā</i> MA/NA: (lū) <i>lā išapparā/a</i>	OA: <i>ē išpurā</i>
2c.	OA/MA: <i>šuprā</i> NA: <i>šupra</i>		OA: <i>lā</i> <i>tašapparā</i> MA/NA: (lū) <i>lā tašapparā/a</i>	OA: <i>ē tašpurā</i>
1c.		OA: <i>lū nišpur</i> NA: <i>nišpur</i>	OA: <i>lā</i> <i>nišappar</i> MA/NA: (lū) <i>lā nišappar</i>	OA: <i>ē nišpur</i>

Both the imperative and precative occur only in positive clauses. The prohibitive conveys a negative command and is formed by the negative particle *lā* and the present. In MA/NA the command may be emphasized with *lū*. To express a negative wish, the vetitive is used. In OA, the vetitive is expressed by the particle *ē* and the preterite but, in later Assyrian, the vetitive is replaced by the prohibitive: (lū) *lā* + present (see Kouwenberg 2010: 212–20).

Stative

The stative has a nominal base, normally an adjective, and a pronominal ending to mark the subject. Following Kouwenberg (2000), we understand the stative as a finite verbal form; it expresses a state or situation in the past, present, or future. The stative of transitive verbs can be active or passive in sense. An example is shown in Table 17.10.

Table 17.10 Stative

<i>marā</i> ^S <i>u</i> (<i>a/a</i>) “to be ill”	Singular	Plural
3m.	OA: <i>maru</i> ^S “he is/was/ will be ill” MA/NA: <i>mari</i> ^S	OA/MA: <i>mar</i> ^S <i>ū</i> NA: <i>mar</i> ^S <i>u</i>
3f.	<i>mar</i> ^S <i>at</i>	OA/MA: <i>mar</i> ^S <i>ā</i> NA: <i>mar</i> ^S <i>a</i>
2m.	OA: <i>mar</i> ^S <i>āt(i)</i> MA: <i>mar</i> ^S <i>āta</i> NA: <i>mar</i> ^S <i>āka</i>	OA/MA: <i>mar</i> ^S <i>ātunu</i> NA: <i>mar</i> ^S <i>ākunu</i>
2f.	OA/MA: <i>mar</i> ^S <i>āti</i> NA: <i>mar</i> ^S <i>āki</i>	OA: <i>mar</i> ^S <i>ātini</i> MA: * <i>mar</i> ^S <i>ātini</i> NA: * <i>mar</i> ^S <i>ākina</i>
1c.	<i>mar</i> ^S <i>āk(u)</i>	<i>mar</i> ^S <i>āni</i>

Indirect commands or desired actions can be expressed by a precative, using the particle *lū* with a stative (e.g., *lū dannat* “let her be strong”).

Ventive and subjunctive

Originally, finite verbal forms with the first singular dative suffix expressed the motion “to me.” From early on, however, this verbal expression indicated action, mostly motion, in the direction of the speaker/writer or the addressee (e.g., *illik* “he went,” *illika(m)* “he came”, *allika(m)* “I came”). The first singular dative suffix is thus used as a ventive morpheme. The ventive mainly appears with verbs of motion and is often used together with pronominal suffixes.

The subjunctive morpheme marks the verb in subordinate clauses and in solemn oath-bound statements (see Parpola and Watanabe 1988: xxxviii–xl). In MA/NA, the subjunctive is mostly a combined morpheme *-(ū) ... ni*, where the *ū* is added to finite forms without an ending and the *-ni* follows at the end of the verbal form, i.e., after possible suffixes. In OA, however, the morpheme *-ni* is obligatory when the ending *-ū* is not possible, elsewhere it is optional.

Non-finite forms

The non-finite forms of the verb are the infinitive, active participle, and verbal adjective. The infinitive is a masculine singular verbal noun, such as *šabātu(m)* “to seize.” The active participle can only be derived from action-verbs and is often lexicalized. It is translated in English with a gerund (i.e., a verbal noun ending in “-ing,” e.g., *šābitu(m)* “seizing”) or a relative clause of the type “who/that does/did X,” e.g., *šābitu(m)* “one who seizes”). The verbal adjective, or gerundive, denotes a state or situation in the past, present, or future (e.g., *šabtu* “seized;” cf. stative). Most adjectives in Akkadian are verbal adjectives.

Stems

The tables above give the forms of the basic Akkadian G-stem but, as already mentioned, there are also derived stems that are marked differently, with the doubling of the middle radical (D-stem), with the affix *š* (Š-stem), or with the affix *n* (N-stem). Each of these four stems can have substems formed by the infixes *-ta-* (Gt, Dt, and Št) or *-tan-* (Gtn, Dtn, Štn, and Ntn). The substems with *-ta-* exist in OA, but become rare in MA and disappear entirely in NA, where the Dtt, a new substem, is employed instead of the Dt. The personal prefixes for the present, preterite, and perfect of the G- and N-stem have *i* or *a*, whereas the D- and Š-stem have *u* (see [Table 17.6](#)).

In addition to distinctive phonological markers, each of these stems has its own semantic range. The main function of the D-stem, for example, is factitive (e.g., *damāqu(m)* “to be good; (D) to do (something) well”). The basic sense of the Š-stem is causative to the G-stem (e.g., *šakāmu* “to understand; (Š) to explain”). The N-stem normally adds a passive or reciprocal meaning to the G-stem in OA (e.g., *šabātum* “to seize; (N) to be captured, to grasp one another”). In NA the N-stem is mostly suppressed by third person plural forms of other stems to convey a passive sense.

Syntax

Every clause consists of a subject and a predicate. The predicate determines whether a clause is nominal or verbal: verbal clauses have a finite verb (including the stative) as a predicate (Kouwenberg 2000: 68). The temporal interpretation of a verbal clause can usually be derived from the tense of its verb; the tense of a nominal clause can only be determined from its context. Whatever the nature of a clause is, subject and predicate usually agree in number and gender. Nouns may be followed by adjectival attributes which agree in gender, number, and case with the noun they qualify. Unlike its

Semitic cognates, the verb normally stands at the end of a verbal clause in Akkadian. In fact, the basic word order of a positive clause is: subject – (object) – verb/copula, although exceptions occur, e.g., the object – subject – verb word order is frequently used for emphasis. The subject – object – verb word order is generally thought to be due to Sumerian influence. The subject is normally in the nominative and the object in the accusative; however, with the merging of both cases in the singular in NA, the distinguishing case marker disappears and subject and object are mainly determined by word order or context unless the preposition *ana* is used as *nota accusativi*. In all phases of Assyrian, adverbs and prepositional phrases can occur in any position of the clause, but most often they are found at the beginning of a clause, or immediately before the predicate.

Aside from positive and negative main clauses, there are interrogative clauses, conditional clauses, direct and indirect quotations, and (short) exclamations. These different clauses have their own rules for verb tenses: in NA the present (present and future), perfect (past), and stative (past and present) are employed in positive main clauses while the present, preterite (past), and stative are used in negative main clauses. The development leading to the complementary distribution of the two past tenses, perfect (positive) and preterite (negative), took place in MA. Interrogative clauses may include a question word at the beginning or end of the clause, but questions can also be expressed with interrogative intonation which is usually indicated in writing. Conditional clauses are mostly introduced by the particle *šumma*, and secondarily by *kīma* “if” in NA. Direct quotations that are main clauses are preceded by *umma* SPEAKER-*ma* (OA), *mā* (all persons in MA; second and third person in NA) or *muk/nuk* (first person in NA); indirect quotations are subordinated, marked with the subjunctive ending *-(ū) ... ni*, to their preceding main clauses. Finally, while MA and NA have only the negative particle *lā*, OA had three negations: *lā*, *ula*, and *ē*. The last one only appeared in the vetitive or together with *lā* (Hecker 1968 § 105a).

Lexicon

The Akkadian lexicon is largely common Semitic, although many basic words have no Semitic parallel (e.g., *ana* “to, for” and *māru(m)* “son” instead of Semitic **li* and **bn*). Loanwords derived from many different languages enriched its lexicon, albeit sometimes only in a limited area or for a short period of time. A considerable number of Sumerian words entered Akkadian at an early stage, and vice versa. As expected from the linguistic environment of the respective periods, Anatolian words of mainly Hittite, Luwian, or Hurrian origin entered the OA lexicon, while the NA lexicon was influenced by Aramaic.

Abbreviations

AEAD:

Parpola, S. and R.M. Whiting (ed.), *Assyrian-English-Assyrian Dictionary*, Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project/Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007.

AHw:

von Soden, W., *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1958–81.

CAD:

The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1956–2010.

RIMA 1:

Grayson, A.K. *Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennia B.C. (to 1115 B.C.)*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987.

RIMA 2:

Grayson, A.K. *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium B.C. I (1114–859 B.C.)*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991.

RIMA 3:

Grayson, A.K., *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium B.C. II (858–745 B.C.)*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.

RINAP:

Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011–.

SAA 2:

Parpola, S. and Watanabe, K., *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1988.

SAA 4:

Starr, I., *Queries to the Sungod: Divination and Politics in Sargonid Assyria*, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989.

SAA 8:

Hunger, H., *Astrological Reports to Assyrian Kings*, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1992.

SAA 19:

Luukko, M., *The Correspondence of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II from Calah/Nimrud*, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2012.

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Further Reading

Most standard reference grammars (von Soden 1995, Buccellati 1996) and study books (e.g., Caplice 2002⁴, Huehnergard 2005², and Worthington 2010) describe Babylonian. Up-to-date summaries of Akkadian grammar can be found in Buccellati 1997, Huehnergard and Woods 2004, and Streck 2005. Assyrian is treated by Hecker 1968 (OA), Mayer 1971 (MA), and Hämeen-Anttila 2000 (NA).

The main dictionaries are AHw/CDA, CAD, and AEAD. Walker 1987 and Finkel and Taylor 2015 present an overview of cuneiform; Borger 2010² and Labat and Malbran-Labat 1995 provide general sign lists of Akkadian and Sumerian cuneiform.

Recent introductions to various ancient Near Eastern languages are found in Woodard 2004 and Postgate 2007. Old Aramaic was studied by Degen 1969 and Hug 1993.

Note

- * We would like to thank Graham Cunningham, Bert Kouwenberg, and Jaume Llop for their critical remarks and suggestions.

CHAPTER 18

Assyrian Religion

Stefan M. Maul

What is actually Assyrian about “Assyrian religion?”¹ This question immediately arises in any study of the Assyrians’ religious beliefs, their divine cults, their piety, their prayers, and their rituals. After all, most of the great gods venerated in Assyria bear the names of the very same deities that were venerated in the ancient civilization of southern Mesopotamia, and in Assyria too were these gods bound to the mythological narratives that had taken their literary form in the south. Many hymns to the gods, prayers, and descriptions of rituals that circulated in Assyria were inspired by Babylonian and Sumerian models, or were copies of texts that originated in Babylonia. Assyrian temple architecture and art are likewise indebted to Babylonian traditions in a fundamental way. To what degree the south influenced Assyrian culture and religion is clear from the fact that, both in the divine cult and in the official proclamations of Middle and Neo-Assyrian kings, the prevailing idiom used was not the native Assyrian language, but rather the languages of the south – primarily Babylonian, which was closely related to Assyrian, but also Sumerian, which was already extinct by the early second millennium BCE.

During the late Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods, these Babylonianizing tendencies were strengthened considerably as Assyrian rulers consciously attempted to give, at least outwardly, a Babylonian appearance to their systems of government, their institutions, their ceremonies, and their piousness, whether it was in order to make Assyria appear more familiar to the kingdoms and principalities of the Near East that were strongly influenced by Babylonian culture or meant to dissociate from Babylon the symbols of Babylonian culture that were connected to its claim to power and to transfer them to Assyria. What is genuinely Assyrian is therefore not always easy to recognize beneath an exterior that appears initially to be quintessentially Babylonian. To complicate matters, some phenomena of Babylonian origin are far better known from Assyrian sources than from Babylonian ones and may only misleadingly appear to us as typically Assyrian. For this reason, the time is not yet ripe to present here a substantial comparison between Assyrian and Babylonian religion. Thus, in this chapter, the discussion will often be rather about the religion and cult in Assyria than about the typically Assyrian traits of Assyrian religion.

The City of Ashur and its Temples in the Third Millennium BCE

The traveler who journeys from the flat, fertile Babylonian alluvial plain to the north rapidly learns to recognize that Babylonia and Assyria may indeed have shared cultural roots but always remained two entirely different countries in terms of their natural settings. Beyond Samarra, vegetation becomes increasingly meager. Some 150 kilometers further north comes the Babylonian plain to an unexpected, abrupt end. Like a locking bolt, a 300 meter high, jagged mountain range stretches before the traveler, through which only the Tigris breaches its course, via the el-Fatḥa strait. Behind this natural boundary, the Jebel Ḥamrin, lies Assyria, a land in which – unlike in Babylonia – there are no more palm groves, but rain-fed agriculture is possible. The mountains continue into the Jebel Khanukah, which then tapers off in low chains towards the north. On one of these elevations, which stands a proudly soaring 25 meters high towards the northeast over the Tigris only to plummet almost vertically down to the river, lies Ashur, the starting point of Assyrian culture.

The god who carries the name of the city of Ashur and its dominion, which steadily grew over the course of centuries, is without doubt unmistakably Assyrian and intrinsic to the Assyrian religion (Tallqvist 1932; Lambert 1983). The god Assur is the heart of Assyrian religion even though he likely played no prominent role in the early history of Northern Mesopotamia.

In Nineveh and Arbela, the ancient cities that developed into the most important centers of the Assyrian heartland during the second and first millennia BCE, it was from the earliest periods not a male deity that stood at the center of religious veneration but rather the great goddess that would later – under the influence of southern Mesopotamia – be equated with Ištar, the goddess of war and unstoppable lust. There are some indications that this was no different in the early history of Ashur.

Already in the mid-third millennium BCE, a probably not insignificant city blossomed on this privileged site, from which one could control the trade routes to Babylonia, Syria, Anatolia, and into the Iranian highlands and thereby obtain great wealth, while enjoying the security provided by the sparse no-man's-land separating Assyria from Babylonia in the south.

The construction of monumental buildings in Ashur in later periods, and the digging of foundations and the leveling that went along with it, almost completely destroyed the remains from this time, but a glimpse into the early period of Ashur was granted to the excavators of the city in at least one place. The unique but, unfortunately, largely isolated evidence conveys to us a

surprisingly detailed impression of the religious life of the city. In northern Ashur, deep below the foundations of several subsequent buildings, were discovered the remains of a temple that was most likely dedicated to the great goddess of Assyria, as were the later sanctuaries that lay above it (Andrae 1922 and 1935; Bär 2003; Schmitt 2012). In a blaze of fire, possibly set by hostile conquerors, the roof and walls of the sanctuary caved in at some point, burying the interior of the cult room under them. In this room of about 16 × 6 meters, which one entered from the long side, there was a niche located on the narrow side. There, on a pedestal, once stood the cult image of the probably nude goddess, vaulted by a narrow, deep compartment. She appeared to confront the worshipper as if she were coming from another, transcendental world. This oldest temple layout, which the excavators called “archaic,” already shows the basic design of the later Assyrian temple and testifies to the appreciation for tradition that is so characteristic of Assyrian culture. As in later times, the goddess was even then already provided with daily meals and smoke offerings. A small blood basin for animal sacrifices, clay incense-holders and stepped altars, sacrificial bowls and libation vessels bear witness thereof. Fragments of almost ninety alabaster statuettes depicting men and women, some sitting and others standing, with folded hands and large eyes that were directed contemplatively into the distance, were found in the debris. Many of these sculptures, which were generally less than 50 centimeters high, could be reassembled. The findspots suggest that they were positioned on low mud-brick benches on the long sides of the cult room. The men are shaved bald and wear a “tressed skirt,” probably made from sheepskin, which leaves the upper body uncovered. The women, adorned with ornate, wide plaits of hair, are likewise wrapped in a tressed robe, which, however, mostly leaves only the right shoulder free. Such statues were probably meant to represent their donors permanently before the deity and to secure divine favor with uninterrupted prayer.

The parallels to conventions from the “high period” of Assyria in the second and first millennia BCE should not be overlooked here. In the Neo-Assyrian period the Assyrian kings still took care to set up their statues in the most important cult centers of the land, where they remained steadfastly in their place listening in prayer for the divine command, while the gods “gazed benevolently” upon them and thus blessed their endeavors. One could therefore assume that the votive statues from the “archaic Ištar temple” portray several generations of early city leaders of Ashur, as well as their wives, sons, and high officials, asking for blessings for themselves and for their city. Perhaps already the early city leaders expressed their gratitude to the goddess by dedicating booty to her, such as is documented first for the Old Akkadian period in an inscription of the ruler Ititi (Grayson 1987: A.O.1001) and then increasingly in the second and first millennia BCE during the heyday of the Assyrian kingdom.

The telling, albeit singular finds from the Early Dynastic Ištar temple in Ashur leave no doubt that, in the third millennium BCE, the people in northern Mesopotamia – just as in the south – imagined that the divine forces they called upon to attain benevolence were anthropomorphic. Like princes, deities resided in monumental houses and, through their presence, provided protection to the community. The furnishings of the temples – implements for sacrifices, various types of offerings, and votive statues – demonstrate that the Assyrians attempted to secure divine protection through consistent devotion and through the diligent care and nurturing of the deity.

We do not know if, in that early time, the rulers of the city also sought to obtain the grace of the god Assur; indeed, we cannot even say if the cult of Assur was already propagated in the third millennium BCE. The archeologists were unable to detect any building remains that could be interpreted with any likelihood as the remnants of an early preexisting structure under the foundations of the later, monumental Assur temple. It is therefore possible that the cult of Assur was much younger than that of the “great goddess” who was later referred to as Ištar, and that it was only in the late third millennium BCE that a male deity of the name Assur increasingly surpassed the female deity.

If the excavators are correct (Haller and Andrae 1955: 9ff., 12ff.), the nucleus of the settlement of Ashur (Bär 1999: 10f.), the cliff rising precipitously over the Tigris in the extreme northeast of the city, which was later crowned by the Assur temple, may have remained without a widely visible cult center for a long time.² This would be in line with later Assyrian historical tradition, which ascribed the construction of the temple not to the gods themselves or the very first ruler of Ashur, but rather to Ušpia, the otherwise obscure sixteenth monarch of the Assyrian King List, who is counted as the penultimate of the early kings who “lived in tents” (see Grayson 1980–3: 103 and Grayson 1987: A.0.77.2: 5–7; Borger 1956: 3 iii 16ff.).

The God Assur

Even the name of the most Assyrian of all gods escapes our understanding. We cannot etymologize it, and we do not know whether Assur (Aššur) bears the name of his city or the city the name of its god.³ Already in the Old Assyrian period the concepts “god Assur” and “city Ashur” were inextricably interwoven, even in the writings of the divine name and the name of the city: not infrequently, the divine determinative was added to the name of the city and the determinative for localities to the name of the god (Galter 1996). The clarity that should actually be established with the help of a determinative is

thus deliberately obfuscated. City and god, such is the message, are inseparable from each other.

Unlike all of the other great gods of the ancient Near East, Assur was originally an independent and solitary god who was conceived as entirely without family and without involvement in divine communities and hierarchies. For him, neither father nor mother is envisioned, nor does he have a wife and children. The city gods of Babylonia, in contrast, all have a place in the complex Mesopotamian pantheon – just as their cities are integrated into a political system, they are related to one another through family ties. Furthermore, even if they were worshipped as the lords of their city, they always also represent a cosmic force or an aspect of culture. Thus is Enlil, the god of Nippur, in equal measure the father and king of the gods and the divine representative of the unpredictable natural force of the earth that brings forth flood and earthquakes. Nanna-Sîn, the god of Ur, is the moon with all of the celestial body's associated properties, and Utu-Šamaš, the god of Larsa and Sippar, is the sun god, who is also the patron deity of order and justice and the god of the homeless and disconsolate. Finally, Enki-Ea, venerated as the god of the city Eridu and as lord of the fresh water, embodies the power of intellect that produces civilization and clever solutions for any problem.

Assur is completely free of such qualities. His character is difficult to capture. He is the city and its power; no further attributes can be identified. While numerous myths feature the gods of Babylonia, depicting in great detail their respective characteristic traits, Assur remains strangely without face or fable. Even in a late hymn to the god from the reign of Assurbanipal (668–631 BCE), descriptions of heroic exploits of any kind that would allow any conclusions about Assur's character or his history are lacking. Only Assur's splendor and strength and his power and omnipotence are praised, while his character is described as being incomprehensible even for the gods (Livingstone 1989: 4–6; Foster 2005: 817–19 IV.4b). Assur is called “the maker of (all) the creatures of heaven and earth, fashioner of the mountains” (Livingstone, loc. cit., 4: 15), but aside from this reference to his role as a primeval god of creation, allusions to more specific deeds are missing. Assur appears without attributes, he is simply god. So it is not surprising that, particularly in the Old Assyrian period, he is often mentioned not with his name but rather is just called *ilum* “god.”

Somewhat ironically, it was exactly this absence of any particular character traits that permitted the unprecedented rise of Assur, for it allowed the recognition of an all-encompassing divinity in him, which could easily absorb deities venerated in other regions. Over the course of centuries, as the city and the state of Ashur became more and more prominent and influential, Assur too grew from a largely inconsequential local deity into a global god. Assur's transformation into a great god is quite interesting from the point of view of the history of religion, as there are few other cases of deities rising to

prominence that are equally well documented.

The god Assur was probably not only connected to his city but also very closely associated with the steep rock projection towering over the Tigris upon which his temple was constructed. An inscription of the Middle Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233–1197 [1243–1207] BCE) states specifically that Assur, “the lord of the mountain Abi^h, loved his mountain,” and commanded the king “to build a lofty residence in its center” (Schroeder 1922: Text Nr. 54; Weidner 1959: 36). The cliff in Ashur called Abi^h was inextricably linked with the god and his cult site. Even when, in the early Neo-Assyrian period, the city of Ashur no longer satisfied the geopolitical and logistical demands that the capital of a large empire had to contend with and Aššurnāṣirpal II (883–859 BCE) left the old capital in order to establish a new residence further in the north in Kal^hbu (Nimrud), Ashur remained the uncontested sole seat of the god Assur and with that the religious and cultic center of Assyria. Aššurnāṣirpal II did not consider a relocation of the cult to the new royal residence, nor did his successors in the later Neo-Assyrian period, who relocated the court first to Dur-Šarrukin and then to Nineveh. To implement additional cult centers for Assur in the respective royal residences, duplicating the god’s cult, also did not come into consideration – too closely was he connected with the location of his cult in Ashur.⁴

The only exception to this rule occurred during the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I, the first king of Ashur to leave the time-honored but space-constricted capital city to establish a new royal residence. Only three kilometers upstream from Ashur, on the opposite bank of the Tigris, he produced out of thin air an entire city with temples and palaces, proudly gave it the name Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta, and attempted to relocate the cult of Assur to the new residence. Not only was a new royal palace constructed there but also a cult building with a stepped tower that was consecrated to Assur (Andrae 1977: 174–6; Heinrich 1982: 215–217; Eickhoff 1985: 27–35). Yet the magnificent temple building was probably thought of only as a temporary residence of the god, to be used in the context of festive ceremonies associated with processions (Miglus 1993: 199–204) – due to its comparatively small size, it seems unlikely that it was meant to completely replace the old Assur temple. In any case, Tukulti-Ninurta’s newly established building was given up after only a few years of use, and was made unusable (Eickhoff 1985: 34f.). Tukulti-Ninurta’s attempt to move Assur to another location, close to his new residence, was apparently considered an act of severe hubris that contributed to the king’s poor reputation. Assur was not to be removed from his cliff.

An ancient representation of the deified cliff of Assur, partly human-shaped, adorned with “scales” representing a mountain, and accompanied by two gods associated with wellsprings, has been preserved on a stone relief that most likely originated from the Old Assyrian period. It seems to have been housed in the Assur temple for centuries, until it was thrown into the well of the main

court of the temple by the conquerors of Ashur in 614 BCE (Andrae 1931; Kryszat 1995).

All in all, then, it seems likely that the original cult place associated with Assur was the cliff towering over the Tigris. For a long time, there seem to have been no major architectural structures on the cliff. It was possibly the Assyrian ruler Ušpia, who remains a largely obscure figure to us, who first gave Assur – as well as other gods – a fixed dwelling.

When, at the end of the third millennium BCE, merchants from Ashur established trade colonies in Anatolia and brought their city to great wealth, soon too did the house of Assur receive a new, more splendid form. Yet even though several inscriptions of the ruler Erišum are known that deal with the new temple and its dimensions (Grayson 1987: A.0.33), we can form no proper conception of it. What we do know is that it housed the god – just as in later periods – in the form of a probably life-sized image in the round. A letter found in the Assyrian trading colony Kaniš speaks specifically about the fact that thieves had penetrated the temple and “had stolen the sun (wrought) from gold from the chest of Assur, as well as the sword of Assur” (Hirsch 1961: 14; Larsen 1976: 261f., n. 37). This is, incidentally, the only passage suggesting that Assur was associated with the sun already in the early period, perhaps even as the god who gave the sun its space (?).

The temple of Assur bore the curious name – probably referring to the god’s overwhelming power – “House, Wild Bull” (Grayson 1987: A.0.33.1:16). On an Old Assyrian seal, which is explicitly labeled as the seal “of (the god) Assur,” a remarkable image has been preserved, which, in the style of many Ur III period seals, shows an interceding deity before a peculiar symbol that may depict in equal measure the temple of the god and his craggy cult site as well as the might of Assur. It shows a mound armored with “mountain scales” standing on four legs and furnished with a bull protome (Veenhof 1993: 652 with n. 27 and Pl. 124), thus representing the name of the temple almost pictographically.

Although it was, as a rule, not tolerated to give Assur a home elsewhere, Assur’s might was also present in the trading colonies. Kaniš and other places where Assyrian merchants lived received ceremonial weapons that were regarded as the weapons of the god. In legal cases, following old Mesopotamian traditions, oaths had to be sworn before these weapons (Hirsch 1961: 64–7). This amounted to self-imprecation in the case of perjury, which was expected to result in a deadly strike by the god with just those weapons. In addition, the “sword of Assur” received in regions far from the homeland the deference that otherwise was given to Assur in his home city. Even in Neo-Assyrian times, ceremonial weapons were used in the temples of captured territories in order to demonstrate the presence and the might of Assyria’s gods (see, for example, Fuchs 1998: 25 and 55: 6–8, as well as Holloway 2002: 151–77).

In the Old Assyrian period, Assur was by no means the only god venerated in his city. Besides him are named, above all, Adad, the weather god, and his father, the sky-god Anum, the moon- and the sun-god, as well as Ištar of Ashur, now, in most cases, called *Aššurītum* (“the Assyrian”). In lists of multiple deities, Assur, however, always stands in the first position. For a long time he was regarded specifically as the “king”:⁵ not only as the king of the gods but also as the true king of his city.

The political power of the ruler, who stood at the helm of the city in the Old Assyrian period and called himself “overseer” (*waklum*) or “great one,” (*rubā’um*), was restricted. The “overseer” was apparently simply the head of the influential assembly of the powerful citizens of Ashur, much rather than a king equipped with far-reaching power (Larsen 1976: 109–91). Yet he was also – following a concept that we encounter in southern Mesopotamia already in the early third millennium BCE – the earthly representative of the god Assur, who served as intermediary between the god and his land and guaranteed as a trustee that the property of the god was enlarged and tended to. The Assyrian word that designates this function, *iššiakkum*, goes back to the Sumerian title *ensi(ak)*, “vice-regent (of the god NN).”

The office of High Priest remained a central one for Assyrian rulers from the Old Assyrian period onwards. The rulers cared for the well-being of their god, by means of which they also guaranteed the well-being of their subjects, whom the god had entrusted to them. Until the downfall of the Assyrian empire at the end of the seventh century BCE, little of this changed in principle, even though, with the growth of their power in the course of the Middle Assyrian period, the rulers of Ashur began to assume the title “king” (*šarrum*), following the Babylonian example (Seux 1967: 295ff.). One of the most important duties of the rulers of Ashur was to watch over the main task issued to mankind according to the ancient Near Eastern creation myths: to care for the gods and particularly for the god who embodied one’s own land (Maul 2008).

It almost appears as if only the “vice-regent” was able to maintain the connection between “King Assur” and his mortal subjects. Virtually all remaining hymns and prayers to Assur are formulated in the name of the ruler, while prayers to Assur designated for other people are entirely absent – very much in contrast to extant prayers directed to other great gods of the ancient Near East. Moreover, as we know from later period texts, the major rituals and festivities revolving around Assur, especially the New Year’s festival, could not be carried out in the absence of his “vice-regent,” because it was incumbent upon him alone “to grasp the hand of the god” and with this to bring the ritual into motion.

The Theology of Assur and His Elevation to Universal Dominion

In the late 19th century BCE, the city and the temple of Assur received a completely new design, and it appears that, during that time, the god Assur also became associated with an entirely new theology, which was to shape the image of the god until the downfall of Ashur. Šamši-Adad (ca. 1808–1776 BCE), a ruler of Amorite origin, had conquered Ekallatum, a city that lay in Assyrian territory, and from there also brought under his sway Ashur and an entire Upper Mesopotamian kingdom that ranged westward until the Euphrates. As Sargon of Akkad had formerly done, he now called himself “king of the universe” (*šar kiššatim*), thus expressing his far-reaching claims to sovereignty to the rival kingdoms of Mesopotamia that were struggling for hegemony. Although later times saw in him a king who was “not of the flesh of the city Ashur,” he was the one who gave the house of Assur the monumental form that was retained largely unchanged for more than one thousand years, until the downfall of the city (Haller and Andrae 1955; van Driel 1969; Miglus 2001). The new building, with which, “at the command of Assur,” the self-proclaimed “*pacifier* of the lands between the Tigris and Euphrates” (Grayson 1987: A.0.309.1:5–10) replaced the decayed Assur Temple of Erišum, was, however – as the building inscriptions reveal – not dedicated to Assur but rather to the god Enlil. Yet in no way had Šamši-Adad abolished the cult of Assur with this. His new Assur theology, strongly influenced by southern Mesopotamian ideas, implied that Assur was none other than Enlil, the king of the gods of the Sumerian-Babylonian pantheon, who was worshipped in Nippur.

This was both a bold and a politically clever maneuver. During the third millennium BCE, Nippur had become the undisputed cultic-religious center of the federation of southern Mesopotamian cities and had maintained, as the most important seat of the gods, this paramount position under the mighty kingdom of the Third Dynasty of Ur. In the Sumerian city-states of the third millennium, supremacy came to the ruler who had command over Nippur, the city of Enlil, “the king of the gods” and “king of all lands,” and who provided for the god. Nippur was considered the heart of a large united territory for which the provider of the king of the gods bore a special responsibility – wherever his royal court was located. When the political fragmentation that followed the collapse of the Ur III dynasty put this role of Nippur into question, Šamši-Adad found himself in the position to do what would have previously been unthinkable: to construct in another location, namely in Ashur, a “new Nippur” and with that, as “the appointee of Enlil (*šakin Enlil*),” to raise a claim not only over a city but also over an, in principle, endlessly expandable large-scale territory.

The figure of the god of Assur lent itself to equation with Enlil. Like Enlil,

Assur had been regarded for quite some time as the king of the gods; and Enlil's epithets "great mountain" and "wild bull" were very much in line with corresponding qualities of Assur. So it was quite reasonable that Šamši-Adad endeavored to reproduce in Ashur the cultic topography of Nippur, which was aligned to Enlil, and that he gave his new temple the ceremonial Sumerian name É-am-kur-kur-ra, "House, Wild Bull of All Lands," after the southern Mesopotamian archetype. Based on the evidence from later periods (see George 1992: 186–91 and Menzel 1981: T 146–9), the Enlil-Assur temple of Šamši-Adad was probably furnished with shrines for many other great gods, in order to show that the cult place of the god, as was taught about Nippur, was the origin of all divinity and the true home of all gods. We come to know of the abundance of the gods worshipped in Ashur from a letter of Šamši-

Adad in which he chides his son Yasma^b-Addu for housing far too many gods in Mari: "But now you fill the city (i.e. Mari) with (statues of) gods, while the sheep for the sacrifice do not suffice. What is this, what do you do there? Do you have no advisor who advises you? The city Mari is full of gods. No other city is as full of gods as Mari. Only Mari and Ashur are so full of gods!" (Charpin 2004: 379 with n. 40).

Following the example of the Enlil temple in Nippur, an enormous stepped tower with a base of about 60 × 60 meters and a height that was probably likewise 60 meters (Haller and Andrae 1955: 2–5; Miglus 1985), crowned with a small temple, arose in Ashur, in the immediate vicinity of the Assur temple. The rites and festivities associated with such a building in Nippur were probably introduced in Ashur as well. The time-honored cultic institutions of Nippur, which were considered to be closely linked to creation and believed to be primeval, were now accessible in Ashur too. Later, the belief that not only was Ashur a mirror image of Nippur, but that Nippur was also a mirror image of Ashur, was reinforced in historical-mythological narratives. Enlil himself speaks in one of them of his "two cultic sites," Nippur and Ashur, and takes the form of a white raven to reveal, after a destruction of both his seats, the location for reconstruction in both places (Frahm 2009: 145–51, text no. 76).

Šamši-Adad was possibly not the first who attempted to raise the influence of the god Assur by equating him with a king of the gods. Long before Šamši-Adad was Dagan, the "Enlil" of the middle Euphrates region, worshipped in the house of Assur (Grayson 1987: A.0.31) – probably, just like Enlil later, as an emanation of Assur himself. So it may be that Šamši-Adad took up again an already old idea, this time to make Ashur into a cultic center whose prestige would reach far beyond northern Mesopotamia and into the south. As the "appointee of Enlil," he probably had in mind to extend his reach of power far into that region. This would admittedly not come to pass. But the idea of establishing a supraregional center by creating a "new Nippur," erected at another location, that adopted the city's old traditions continued to persist

over several centuries. Indeed, the doctrine of Ashur as the seat of the “Assyrian Enlil, the lord of all lands” constituted the ideological core of the expansive power politics of Assyria in the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods.

Šamši-Adad’s attempt to appropriate the status of Nippur for his own political interests was also highly consequential in another respect. For it appears as though, only a short time after Šamši-Adad, Hammurabi, the powerful king of Babylon, took up Šamši-Adad’s idea. He considered Babylon the “new Nippur” and himself the appointee of Enlil. Hammurabi believed that his aggressive politics were crowned with such great success because he fulfilled a divine plan of salvation. In the introduction to his collection of exemplary “legal decisions,” the so-called Hammurabi Code, Hammurabi explains, retrospectively, the vast success of his expansionist politics with the fact that in a “prelude in heaven,” Anum, the sky-god, and Enlil, the king of gods, effectively transferred to Marduk, the city god of Babylon, the “Enlilship” – that is, the divine king’s authority over all mankind, to be held in perpetuity. Simultaneously, Hammurabi himself, the “appointee” of Enlil, was entrusted with the leadership of the people. Marduk, the previously rather unimportant god of Babylon, was little by little transformed into a new divine king, modeled after Enlil (Sommerfeld 1982), and Babylon and Esagil, the sanctuary of Marduk, were likewise redeveloped following the example of Nippur (George 1992: 4–7 and *passim*). This new Marduk–Enlil theology may well have been inspired by the model of Šamši-Adad’s attempt to identify Assur with Enlil. Once instituted in Babylon, it enjoyed enduring success. Even in periods in which the political influence of Babylon was limited, the city’s claim, originally associated with Nippur, to be the center of the world inspired its rulers and citizens in their fight for independence and greater power.

How enormously significant the equation of Assur with the old Sumerian king of gods Enlil was to become in Assyria is first apparent in the Middle Assyrian period, when a territorial state with more than two dozen provinces came into being. We know from archives of the Assur temple’s administration of offerings (Freydank 1997; Maul 2013) that each individual province had to deliver, year by year, a (fairly modest) amount of grain, sesame, fruits, and honey for sacrifices offered up daily to Assur. That this obligation was considered highly relevant politically can be seen from the fact that it was regulated as a contractually bound agreement concluded between the highest administrator of offerings of the temple and the particular governors of the individual provinces. Both incoming and missing deliveries were recorded with great diligence in the temple. Had only practical concerns mattered, the daily provisions of Assur and the other gods residing in his temple could probably have been covered easily by royal domains or temple estates or could have been defrayed completely by the hinterland of the capital city. But the scrupulous documentation left by the Assur temple’s administrator of

offerings clearly shows that exactly this was not intended. What really mattered was that the basic care of the god was carried out by *all* parts of the Assyrian state *jointly*. Far more important than the need to amass the natural produce required for the regular offerings appears to have been that commodities from the entire country ended up on the table of the gods. God and country thus bear the same name with a very good reason: the land Ashur (*māt Aššur*) with all of its individual parts feeds the god, who himself embodies the land.

This notion, characterizing the Middle Assyrian offering practice, is apparently very old and has a long prehistory, which can be traced back within the cult of Enlil to the third millennium BCE. Already in the 21st century BCE, in the period of the Third Dynasty of Ur, the governors and rulers of the individual provinces belonging to the empire were required, exactly as in the later period, to deliver goods to the Ekur, Enlil's temple in Nippur. From a corpus of several hundred documents from Puzriš-Dagan (modern Drehem), we learn where exactly the meat came from that was placed before Enlil for his daily meals (Sallaberger 2003/2004). The animals for slaughter required for this purpose stemmed not only from the great herds of the state and the temple, but were delivered regularly by all regions of the state. Year after year, governors and rulers of individual provinces sent a fatted sheep or a small billy goat as a gift for the supraregional god Enlil, without shying away from the somewhat disproportionate effort of sending a messenger with a single animal over distances of several hundred kilometers to Nippur.

We find the ancient idea that all parts of the land should nourish their god also in sources from the Neo-Assyrian period, now from the perspective of an all-encompassing worldwide claim to power and with an added cosmological dimension. A royal inscription of Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE), in which he describes the festivals that took place on the occasion of the roofing ceremony for the renovated temple of the imperial god Assur, states: “I slaughtered fattened bulls and butchered sheep; I killed birds of the heavens and fish from the *apsû*, without number; I piled up before them (the gods of the Assur temple) the harvest of the sea and the abundance of the mountains. ... I presented them with gifts from (all) the inhabited settlements, (their) heavy audience gifts” (Borger 1956: 5; Leichty 2011: 127–8). The animals delivered here were not only the sustenance for the god; they represented in addition and above all the three cosmic layers of the world as conceived in the ancient Near East: sheep and bulls stand for the earth, for the man-made and natural swaths of land, the birds for the heavens, and the fish for the sweet-water ocean (*apsû*), over which the earth arches. The highest god is thus sustained by the life force of the entire cosmos in its vertical order, comprising heaven, earth, and sweet-water ocean (*apsû*). And if, as our text claims, “gifts from (all) the inhabited settlements” arrived in Ashur, the idea suggests itself that

the entire community of (civilized) mankind and thus, effectively, the whole “universe” brought its tribute to the god in order to sustain him in a collective effort.

The Assyrian offering practice described here is to a significant extent motivated by the desire to comply with a divine mandate to mankind articulated over and over again in the creation myths. The ancient Sumerian myth *Enki and Ninma*^b as well as the Old Babylonian *Atra*^b*hasis* story and the Babylonian world creation epic *Enūma eliš*, composed in the late second millennium BCE, unanimously relate that man was solely created in order to provide the gods with food and drink. The care and feeding of the gods is, according to these myths, the real, the true task of man, who, in order to show them his gratitude for his existence, had to apply a considerable portion of his labor so that the gods, released from any burden of work, would be cared for.

The demand on man formulated in the creation myths, that the work of *all* should nourish the gods, was implemented in Assyria with the utmost literalness. For Middle Assyrian documents show that, for the preparation of the dishes placed before the god, at least occasionally workers from *all* provinces of the kingdom were enlisted, even though men living in Ashur could have been readily employed for this purpose (Maul 2013). And both in the Middle Assyrian and the Neo-Assyrian period, even the king and the high dignitaries residing in the capital city of the empire provided natural produce for the preparation of the regular offering called the *ginā’u*. In other words: kings, governors, officials and high dignitaries, craftsmen, farmers, and probably also herdsman and cattle-breeders together supplied the daily meals for the god, which could, hence, be considered as gifts that had been provided by a community that comprised all strata of society and the entire territory of the Assyrian state.

Such a conception of sacrifice can create a powerful sense of identity among those involved. Through the act of collective offering, rulers and subjects together become a people of god. In the case of Assyria, in which the name of the god Assur also designates the land and its inhabitants, this is particularly clear. The message delivered by Esarhaddon is in line with this. On the one hand, individuals of “foreign seed” are forbidden from participating in the sacrifice for Assur (Borger 1956: 5; Leichty 2011: 128, vii 13–15), while, on the other hand, in the ritual of the ceremonial laying of the foundation for the new Assur temple, both “noble and lower class people” of the city of Ashur were involved alongside the king’s sons (Leichty 2011: 153, lines 16–17⁶).

We observe here how the “commensal community” of Assur is situated on the way to developing a kind of state identity: among the willing, an Assyrian is he who, whatever his social or geographic background, participates in the care of the deity that carries the name of the land of Ashur and whose sustenance the Assyrian king has to guarantee. The path that leads from an “offering

community” to a supranational political community of the Assyrian people is laid out here.

Significantly, provinces that were newly integrated into the aggressively expanding Neo-Assyrian empire were forced to take part in the regular feeding of the imperial god. King Esarhaddon not only placed a governor over the conquered Egypt, he also imposed upon it, as we learn from his inscriptions, the obligation to provide “in perpetuity regular offerings for Assur and the great gods” (Borger 1956: 99; Leichty 2011: 186, lines 48–9). The regular offerings imposed on the conquered forced them, in addition to everything else, to show their respect to the almost transcendent power of a foreign deity, and to ask for divine benevolence from those who had disempowered them. The correspondence of the later Neo-Assyrian kings shows us that resistance regarding the delivery of the expected gifts was not tolerated and was severely punished. A breakaway from the community of the “subjects of Enlil,” which had to feed the god and thereby sustain the world order, was understood as the gravest transgression.

Assur, His Earthly Representative, and the Community of Gods

The Assyrian kings’ functions as High Priest and “vice-regent” of the highest god had a significant impact, at least since the time of Šamši-Adad, on the topography of the city Ashur, which remained fundamentally unchanged until the late period. The monumental royal palace, constructed in the early second millennium BCE in the north of the city (Preusser 1955; Pedde 2008), lay in the midst of the great temples of Ashur, in a location that bore the name “Courtyard of the (divine) Emblems.” The streets and alleys of the city led to this “forum of the gods.” The deities worshipped here, the personified powers of the cosmic order, thus appeared to turn directly towards the city and its people.

The sanctuary of Assur, in contrast, was not only isolated from the inhabited metropolitan area by an elongated five-cornered forecourt that lay below the temple, but also by the royal palace, which closed the “Courtyard of the Emblems” towards the east. Like a locking bolt, it pushed itself in front of the sanctuary of the chief god. A direct and ground-level entrance to the sanctum of the Assur temple, reserved for the ruler alone, existed only on the side of the palace facing away from the city, alongside the northern cliff face, which was fortified with a massive brick construction that is still impressive today (see [Figures 18.1](#) and [23.1](#)). Only here, a direct entrance by way of a stairwell led from the lateral branch of the Tigris to the temple and palace. From the building inscriptions of the Middle Assyrian period we know that the god

Assur attended upon the ruler yearly in his palace, where a sanctified place with a pedestal designed specifically for him was made available for this purpose (Grayson 1987: A.0.76.16; Weidner 1956: 276, statue 8; Grayson 1991: A.0.87.4:77–89). The other great gods of Ashur were also regularly “invited” into the palace. The highly meaningful proximity of temple and palace that becomes apparent here is also reflected, incidentally, in the ceremonial names that Tukulti-Ninurta I gave to his palace and to the Assur temple in his newly constructed residence Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta. While the palace bore the name É-gal-me-šár-ra, “Palace of the Totality of Divine Powers,” he gave to the temple the name É-kur-me-šár-ra, “House, Mountain of the Totality of Divine Powers” (George 1993: 171, no. 1444, and 117, no. 687), thus indicating that temple and palace were two inseparable counterparts that mirrored each other.

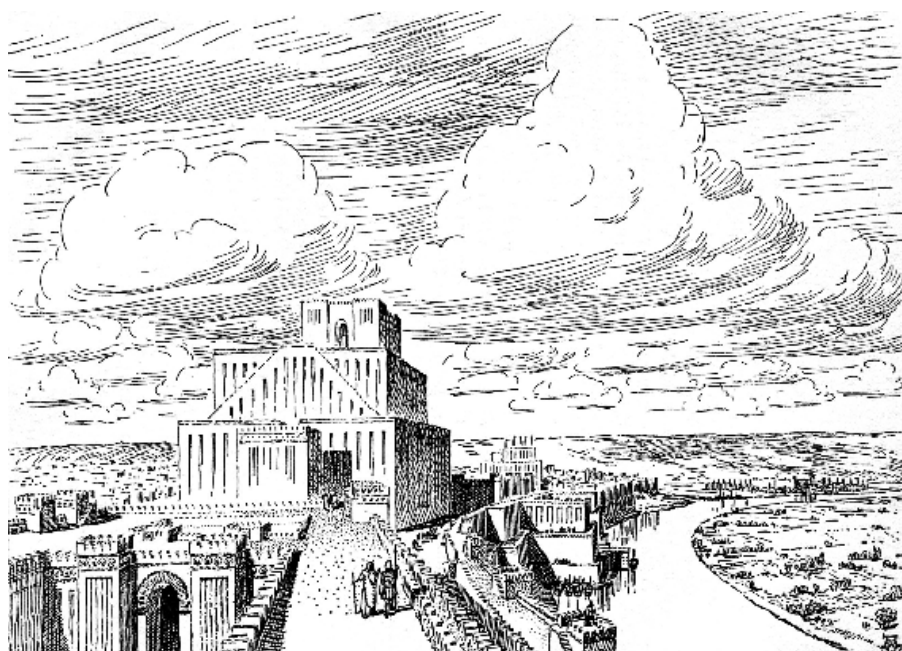


Figure 18.1 View from the roof of the temple of Assur westwards towards the ziggurat and the northern part of the city of Ashur; reconstruction.

Drawing by Walter Andrae. From W. Andrae, *Das wiedererstandene Assur*, Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs 1938, 33.

The “Old Palace” in Ashur constituted, on the one hand, the bridge to the holiest place of divine power, the temple of Assur; on the other hand, it was part of the “Forum of the Gods” that opened up to the city. Here the gods were worshipped who served as protectors and helpers of the “vice-regent of Assur” and determined the fates, but were also subordinated to their divine king Assur. A twin temple connected with the “Old Palace” through a gate and furnished with two small stepped towers, between which were located the

actual temple rooms, was dedicated to the sky-god Anu and his “first son,” the weather-god Adad (Andrae 1909). The weather-god owed his position, surprisingly prominent in comparison to southern Babylonia, to the fact that, unlike in the south of Mesopotamia, the rain-fed agriculture practiced in the north depended to a fundamental degree on the weather. On the opposite side of the plaza were venerated, likewise in twin sanctuaries, the moon-god Šîn and his son Šamaš, the sun (Haller and Andrae 1955; Werner 2009). The moon, with its ever renewing phases, and the sun, with its regularity, were considered by the Assyrians and Babylonians alike as guarantors of an eternal order. They gave the world its structure through time and the calendar and – within limits – made it appear predictable. The third and final great temple complex, which bordered the “Courtyard of the Emblems” to the southwest, was the ancient sanctuary dedicated to Ištar, which was regularly renewed throughout the centuries (Meinhold 2009).

The close proximity of the “vice-regent of Assur” to the world of the gods also reveals itself in the Assyrian coronation ritual, whose main features are familiar to us both through Middle Assyrian (Müller 1937) as well as through Neo-Assyrian ritual scripts (Livingstone 1989: 26–7). At the center of the festivities stood the exclamation “Assur is king, Assur is king!” (Müller 1937: 8, 29; Livingstone 1989: 26, 15), which leaves no doubt about the fact that, in the Assyrian lands – unlike in Babylonia – the true kingship belonged to the god and not to the ruler, his “representative.”

And yet, the ruler was symbolically endowed, during the festivities that accompanied his coronation, with all the divine powers. In a ceremony that took place in the Assur temple, he received insignia that were considered not his but rather borrowed to him by the gods. According to Neo-Assyrian tradition, the sky-god Anu handed over to him his crown, Enlil gave his throne, the pugnacious hero-god Ninurta, Enlil’s son, placed his weapons at his disposal, and Nergal, the god who embodied the annihilating force of plagues, added his terrifying radiance (Livingstone 1989: 27:5–7). In the Middle Assyrian period, the new ruler was equipped with the “crown of Assur” and the weapons of Ninlil, the spouse of Enlil, who was added to Assur-Enlil as consort from this point onwards. The godlike force emanating from these insignia is aptly described in an inscription of Esarhaddon: “Assur, the father of the gods, gave me (the power) to let (cities) fall into ruins and to (re)populate (them), and to enlarge the Assyrian territory; Šîn, the lord of the crown, decreed heroic strength and robust force as my fate; Šamaš, the light of the gods, elevated my important name to the highest rank; Nergal, mightiest of the gods, gave me fierceness, splendor, and terror as a gift; Ištar, the mistress of battle and war, gave to me a mighty bow and a fierce arrow as a present” (Borger 1956: 46; Leichty 2011: 15, lines 30–8). Moreover, when he stepped before Assur and in other instances (Menzel 1981: T 43, 4; T 52, 4; T 76, 3’), the Assyrian ruler carried, at least during the Neo-Assyrian

period, a chain with the symbols of the deities who had equipped him with their power.

On occasions that are unfortunately not yet precisely identifiable, the “vice-regent of Assur” had the responsibility to offer up food and drink for each individual god of the Assur temple, for all the gods of the city, even for the gates, for the river and its gravel islands, for the clouds, for the seas, and for the stars, to ensure the divine blessings. This ritual, which was called *tākultu* (Frankena 1954; van Driel 1969: 159–62; Menzel 1981: T 113–T 145), was probably performed in the Assur temple and in the city and was – as numerous texts document – practiced from the Middle Assyrian period until the downfall of Ashur in the late seventh century BCE. It appears to have originated in the old Sumerian Enlil rituals (see Sallaberger 1993: 143–5).

Even after they had abandoned Ashur as their royal residence, the Assyrian rulers returned to Ashur and the “Old Palace” on a regular basis in order to observe their cultic responsibilities, especially during the annual spring festivities (Maul 2000). In the house of their fathers, the old royal palace, they also found their last resting places, close to their god (Lundström 2009).

As repentant and modest the “vice-regent” appeared when he faced his god in crisis situations, so godlike he appeared to the people entrusted to him, the “subjects of Enlil.” It seems that the idea that the Assyrian ruler possessed certain “divine” qualities gained substantial ground with the proliferation of Assyrian power in the middle of the second millennium BCE (Machinist 2011). In the Neo-Assyrian period, the great Assyrian kings stylized themselves, following the ancient Sumerian example, as the children of the gods, who were reared with the milk of a caring goddess (Foster 2005: 820, IV.4c:13–19 and 39–40; 829–830, IV.4f). After the spring celebrations in Ashur had been rearranged by Ashurbanipal, the king even showed himself to the people on the great forecourt of the Assur temple with the crown of Assur, which was worshipped as divine (Maul 2000: 398). The “day on which the king wears the crown,” the 24th of Šabatu, was considered “the day of the city god,” one of the highest holidays of the Assyrian calendar, and brought before the people’s eyes not only the close bond of the “vice-regent of Assur” with his god, but also showed clearly that divine Assur and the person of the king essentially flowed into each other. A similar message was probably conveyed by the starred cloak of Ashurbanipal (see, for example, Barnett and Lorenzini 1975: 118), which dressed the Assyrian king in the garment of the universe and turned him into the ruler of the world, far above earthly restrictions.

The idea of the divine nature of the Assyrian king found an abominable expression in the brutal warfare of Sennacherib (704–681 BCE). The old conflict between Babylonia and Assyria over dominance in the Near East, increasingly heated since the time of Tukulti-Ninurta I, had led, during the twenty-three-year reign of Sennacherib, to previously unknown dimensions of hostility. After all attempts to secure the sovereignty over Babylonia with

political means had failed, Sennacherib decided to solve his “Babylonian problem” with violence. Babylon was to be obliterated once and for all. By command of the king, the Assyrian armies plundered the city, slew its population, and defiled the temples and divine images. Sennacherib accomplished the Assyrian “retribution” that fell upon Babylon with a mythical “weapon of the gods,” the “deluge” (Seidl 1998), with which the god of creation had once vanquished the dark forces of chaos in order to fashion the world (*Enūma eliš* IV: 49) and which had then been used by Enlil in his attempt to destroy the world again. Deliberately imitating the flood myth, Sennacherib dispensed the weapon, which was attributed to Assur, and reenacted the annihilation of Babylonia as an obliterating flood. He dammed the Euphrates, cut ditches through the metropolitan area, and destroyed Babylon so forcefully with the floodwater that debris was allegedly washed up even in the vicinity of the Gulf island of Bahrain (Dilmun). But by stirring up deep anti-Assyrian resentment, these brutal acts also precipitated Assyria’s eventual downfall.

Politics as Religion and Religion as Politics

Until the end of the Assyrian state, the religious “orthopraxy” of the Assyrian kings was regarded as the real reason for their political and military successes. The “vice-regent” had to provide for the care and fostering of Assur and all the other gods, reconstruct and sustain their temples (Lackenbacher 1982), and face the gods in festivals and rituals in his capacity as High Priest (van Driel 1969: 139ff.; Maul 2000). Only then could he anticipate stability and success. From the Middle Assyrian period onwards, the territorial expansion of Assyria, along with the prosperity of the “subjects of Enlil,” was considered to be a specific sign of divine blessing. Already in the late second millennium BCE, and very much in contrast to the Babylonian south, the Assyrians couched their expansive policy in theological language and explicitly considered it a religious duty. In the coronation ritual of the Assyrian kings, the order the ruler received from the god Assur was: “Expand your land!” (Müller 1937: 12, 35; Livingstone 1989: 26, 3) – even though it was also stipulated that the king should dispense wisdom and exercise law and justice.

The military campaigns of the Middle and Neo-Assyrian kings are accordingly described in their inscriptions as the fulfillment of a divine mandate. Completely in line with this view, the copies of the Neo-Assyrian state treaties concluded with dependent rulers in order to secure loyalty to the Assyrian heir to the throne (Parpola and Watanabe 1988: 28ff.) were sealed not with the king’s seal, but rather with various seals of the god Assur, which – to illustrate the everlasting power of the god – originated from the Old,

Middle, and Neo-Assyrian periods. The breaking of such a treaty was accordingly considered in Assyria not only as a betrayal of the ruler of Ashur, but also, first and foremost, as a sinister offense against the god of the world himself.

In the Middle Assyrian period, certain specificities of the Assur-Enlil theology attained great meaning in warfare. Ninurta, the son of Enlil, who was venerated in Nippur as a hero-god who, at the dawn of time, by the command of his father, had defeated the dark forces of chaos and then had established the world order (Annus 2002), was promoted – henceforth as the son of Assur-Enlil – to the position of an important Assyrian god who held the fortunes of war in his hand. The name of the great Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233–1197 [1243–1207] BCE) reflects the significance that Ninurta had acquired in that time: literally translated, he was called “my trust is in Ninurta.” Certain expressions in Assyrian royal inscriptions reveal that the king understood his struggle against the enemy as the re-actualization of the mythical struggle of the hero Ninurta and considered himself his earthly image, who had achieved in Ninurta’s place the mission of the divine father to rescue the land from the grasp of the “evil forces” (Maul 1999). So it is hardly by chance that Ninurta was worshipped in Kal^hbu, the royal residence newly established by Aššurnāṣirpal II (883–859 BCE) 120 kilometers to the north of Ashur, as the main god of the city.

Just as, in the mythical narratives, Ninurta had to provide an account of his various combats to his divine father, the rulers of Ashur presented to their god, the other gods worshipped in the Assur temple, as well as the city of Ashur and its residents, reports about their martial actions. From the Neo-Assyrian period, several “letters” are preserved with campaign reports directed to the god Assur and probably publicly read to him and other deities (Borger 1971; Frahm 2009: 69–70, text no. 29). In addition, replies composed in the names of Assur and Ninurta are known (Livingstone 1987: 108–15). They are reminiscent of prophecies encouraging the king in the name of Ištar of Arbela, which were likewise recorded in writing (Parpola 1997). The reports read to the gods are probably to be connected to royal triumphs, carried out with great pomp, which culminated in the offering of spoils at the temple. In the Neo-Assyrian period, the sanctuary of the warlike Ištar of Arbela held a prominent position on these occasions. “Tribute from all lands enters into it,” a hymn to this important Assyrian city claims (Livingstone 1987: 20, line 19). There were also visual statements informing the god about military actions undertaken by the king: representations of campaigns on glazed bricks adorned the podium of the Assur temple as well as the ramp and the gate towers that formed an entrance from the northeast to the “main courtyard” of the temple (Haller and Andrae 1955: 56–62).

Ninurta, Nergal, and other gods accompanied the Assyrian king and his army on campaign in the form of standards (Pongratz-Leisten, Deller, and Bleibtreu

1992). Rightly so could a king – as in an inscription of Esarhaddon – claim that he, “with great trust” in his gods, “followed behind their great divinity” into battle (Borger 1956: 65 § 28; Leichty 2011: 54, line 17). Under the last Assyrian kings, martial actions were often scarcely described anymore as achievements of the royal warrior but rather as the work of the gods. In the campaign narratives of Assurbanipal, Assur and Ištar are the ones that attack the enemies of the king (Borger 1996: 234, A § 37:22), and it is the fire-god who, in a manner of speaking, on his own incentive “dropped from heaven and burned (the enemies)” (Borger 1996: 251, Stück 6 16–17). And an Assurbanipal hymn to the warlike Ištar of Nineveh and Arbela claims: “Neither [...] by my [might] nor by the might of my bow, but by the strength and might of my goddesses did I cause the lands disobedient to me to submit to the yoke of Assur” (Foster 2005: 820, 28–30).

The conception of Assur-Enlil as the father of all gods was likewise utilized as an element of Assyria’s ideology of war. After the capture of a city, not only its king and his family were often deported to Assyria, but also the gods worshipped there. Their temples were left behind ownerless, their cities without divine protection and without cult. From the time of Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 BCE) until that of Assurbanipal, some fifty-five relevant cases are attested in the extant Assyrian royal inscriptions (Holloway 2002: 123–144). Hundreds of gods from the entire Near East arrived in Ashur in this way. They were, in the truest sense of the word, subordinated “to their father” Assur. Often provided with a cult, venerated and, in many cases, housed in the Assur temple itself or in other temples of the gods of the city, they became part of the royal household of the father of the gods and had to effectively listen to his commands. The pantheon of Ashur was thus always also an image of Assyria’s imperial power. Only after long negotiations and good conduct on the part of the deprived enemy were some of the kidnapped gods sent back to their original sanctuaries (cf. Holloway 2002: 277–83). To do so, the divine images were sometimes restored in the workshop of the Assur temple – which served as a kind of divine “birthplace” (*bīt mumme*). They were splendidly outfitted and, in a way, newly born. Admittedly, one did not forgo also inscribing “the might of Assur” and of the Assyrian king on the divine images that were sent back (for examples, see Borger 1956: 53, Episode 14; Leichty 2011: 19, lines 6–14; Holloway 2002: 288–91; and more generally Dick 1999) – so that the images could henceforth be recognized at first glance as being the products of Assyrian mercy.

The fate of such an Assyrian captivity befell even Marduk, the god of Babylon, who, like Assur, was modeled after Enlil. The mighty Middle Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I had conquered Babylonia in a war, captured the Babylonian king Kaštiliaš IV, and brought him as hostage to Ashur. Towards the end of the 13th century BCE, he seized Babylon and not only plundered Babylonian libraries, but also brought Marduk from his temple

Esagil to the Assyrian capital city. The Babylonian god, who stayed in Ashur for no fewer than 106 years (Weidner 1939–41: 120), was provided with an elaborate cult there. A ritual text shows us (Köcher 1952) that a festival was celebrated in Ashur – probably in imitation of Babylonian customs – that revolved around Marduk and was reminiscent of the Babylonian New Year’s festival. It thus appears as though it was first under Tukulti-Ninurta I (and his immediate successors) that an attempt was made to detach the Marduk cult from Babylon and to transfer it to Assyria, so as to fuse two competing “kings of the gods” into one single deity. Centuries later, Sargon II (721–705 BCE) made another attempt to redefine the relationship between Assur-Enlil and Marduk-Enlil. In a letter to Assur in which he informs his divine patron about his campaign to the land of the Urartians, Sargon describes his god as follows: “Assur, father of the gods, lord of all lands, the king of heaven and earth, begetter of all, lord of lords, to whom from of old the Enlil of the gods, Marduk, bestowed the gods of heaven and earth and the four corners of the earth, that they ever, without ceasing, honor him above all others, and that he (Assur) bring them into (his temple), the ‘House, high mountain of all lands’⁷ with their accumulated treasures” (Foster 2005: 806–7).

Yet Sargon’s claim that Ashur would be forever the “exalted cult site that Assur, his lord, had chosen for the world as the center [of kingship]” (Vera Chamaza 1992: 23, lines 30–1) did not remain uncontested in Babylonia – even though the Assyrians tried to enforce it through violent means. In the ever more acrimonious struggle between Ashur and Babylon over the hegemony in the Near East in the course of the first millennium BCE, the Babylonians’ unshakable belief in the “Enlilship” of Marduk increasingly became a nuisance to the Assyrians. Similarly to Ashur, so too did Babylon raise the claim, with its powerful divine patron and its cult facilities patterned after Nippur, to be the center of the cosmos and the true seat of kingship (George 1992: *passim*). To the adversaries of Assyria, this was, without doubt, highly welcome. Completely unlike Assur, who always remained exclusively bound to the city Ashur and closely associated with Assyrian kingship, the Babylonian god was also worshipped far beyond the borders of the regions dominated by Babylon, in the entire Near East. He was considered not only the patron god of his city but also a god of wisdom and healing, who watched over all mankind. Such popularity, not linked to state power, Assur never possessed, and some Assyrians undoubtedly envied the Babylonians because of this.

Against the backdrop of the political wrangling began a conflict driven not least by theologians in which the Assyrian side attempted to prove the primeval nature of Assur and, with that, the superiority of their king of the gods over his Babylonian counterpart. Here, the orthography of the name Assur played a substantial role. From the time of Sargon II onwards, a writing for the name of the god became common that designated the unlimited divine

space from which arose all gods and the entire world known to us: *An-šár*, a Sumerian name that literally means “totality of heaven.” The writing came very close to the name *Aššur*, given that one pronounced it *Aššar*. Following the rules of scholarly exegesis, one could thus speculate about whether that primeval Anšar and the Assyrian Assur were identical. The Assyrians liked to believe so and used the new writing in order to demonstrate that Assur must have come into being long before Marduk. The latter was thought to have emerged from Assur and was therefore considered to be subordinate to him. But the Babylonians made very similar claims regarding Marduk. Even though not using etymology as an argument, they considered Marduk, whom they called “creator of the gods, his fathers,” an avatar of Anšar as well.⁸

At the height of the dispute between Assyria and Babylonia, Sennacherib (see [Figure 18.2](#)) wanted to end the conflict conclusively by force of arms and to annihilate Babylon and its sanctuaries once and for all. In the “deluge” staged by Sennacherib, the Marduk temple “sank” too – it was completely destroyed. The Babylonian divine images were smashed and Marduk brought to Ashur. The most significant ritual of Babylonia, a new year’s festival in honor of Marduk called *akītu*, to which the creation epic *Enūma eliš* served as cult legend, was reenacted in Ashur (Frahm 1997: 282–8), to legitimize the political sovereignty of the Assyrian king. Marduk and his cult would be completely absorbed in Assur. On the one hand, Assyrian scholars rewrote *Enūma eliš*, replacing the name of Marduk with that of Assur and the name of the city of Babylon with that of Ashur (Lambert 1997). On the other hand, Sennacherib initiated a comprehensive building program, through which the cultic topography obliterated in Babylon would arise again in Ashur. Marduk’s destroyed *akītu* house, situated outside the gates of Babylon, was built anew outside the gates of Ashur (Haller and Andrae 1955: 74–80; Miglus 1993), and extensions to and architectural changes within the Assur temple made it possible to resume in that sanctuary the rites associated in Babylon with Marduk (Haller and Andrae 1955: 69–73; Frahm 1997: 282–8).



Figure 18.2 King Sennacherib, depicted twice, worshipping the god Assur and his wife Mullissu. Assur is standing on a *musušu*-dragon, a feature adopted from the cult of Marduk of Babylon. Khinniss, “Großes Relief.”

Source: W. Bachmann, *Felsreliefs in Assyrien*, WDOG 52, Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs 1927, 10, Abb. 8.

Posterity considered Sennacherib’s Babylonian politics a most wicked act of hubris. Indeed, after the violent death of Sennacherib, his son and successor Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE) strove for a policy of reconciliation and organized with great energy the reconstruction of Babylon (Porter 1993). Under Assurbanipal, the building activities had so far progressed that the “godnapped” Marduk could be repatriated to his newly constructed temple there – even though the deity, “newly born” in the Assur temple, had been

furnished with Assyrian royal insignia. The Assyrians of this time acknowledged Marduk's role of divine savior and hero, celebrated in *Enūma eliš*, but the role of primeval king of the gods remained that of Assur. Assur's divinity was considered in the late Neo-Assyrian period as so comprehensive that all other deities, even the great goddess Ištar, were regarded by some as manifestations of the Assyrian god.

Swan Song

In 614 BCE, troops under the leadership of the Median king Cyaxares besieged the ancient religious center of the Assyrian empire. Its massive fortifications, considered impregnable (and shaping the landscape of Ashur even today) could offer the city no permanent protection: the enemy troops succeeded in entering the city, and Ashur had to pay the bitter price for the centuries-long subjugation of the peoples of the Near East. The city was left destroyed, plundered, and pillaged. The sanctuary of Assur, which embodied the religious dimensions of Assyrian imperial power like no other place, was so thoroughly leveled that appreciable remains of the building and its furnishings did not even remain preserved in the rubble (Miglus 2000). With the house of Assur and the image of the god would also the spirit of Assyrian imperial rule entirely cease to exist.

The news of the destruction of the Assur temple and the city of Ashur must have been a crushing blow to the last Assyrian king, his confidants, and also the Assyrian population, while spurring on the opponents of the Assyrian empire. The god Assur, people concluded, had apparently abandoned his charges and surrendered them to destruction. In the period following the unexpected withdrawal of the Medes, a few people seem to have continued to lead a humble life in the largely destroyed city (Kühne 2011: 108–10). During this time, rubble was apparently removed and a small sanctuary constructed in the area of the destroyed Assur temple, thus allowing a provisional continuation of the cult (Andrae and Haller 1955: 81; Hauser 2011: 120–7). Perhaps in an attempt to evoke the enormous age of the sanctuary and its association with the numerous “vice-regents of Assur,” a great number of building inscriptions from all periods of Assyrian history were encased in the modest new building (Miglus 1992).

With the fall of Nineveh, the city Ashur seems to have almost completely ceased to exist for a while. But some of the residents of Ashur who had survived the catastrophic collapse of the Neo-Assyrian empire at the end of the 6th century BCE, among them probably also temple affiliates and priests, found refuge in the southern Mesopotamian city Uruk, which had often held loyalty to the Assyrians instead of siding with Babylon (Beaulieu 1997). Documents discovered in Uruk indicate that the city housed an Assyrian

religious community in the period from ca. 605 to 520 BCE (Beaulieu 2003: 331–3, 2010: 254–5). In the new Assur temple constructed there, some of the old knowledge about the cult of the god was apparently carefully preserved.

Yet in Ashur, the cult of the city god did not come to a complete end either. When the city awakened again to new life under the Parthians in the first century BCE and became the seat of a governor who maintained a magnificent palace here, a new temple, inspired by Hellenistic and Parthian models, arose on the ruins of the old Assur sanctuary (Andrae and Lenzen 1933; Hauser 2011). This temple was dedicated neither to Zeus nor to a Persian god, but rather to “Assor.” The city flourished until the third century CE. Discoveries originating from this time breathe the spirit of the Hellenized East. Cuneiform was forgotten, the Assyrian language replaced by Aramaic and Greek. But Aramaic dedicatory inscriptions (Beyer 1998), recorded on the same “days of the city god” (Weidner 1941–44) that were considered holy to Assur already well over 1000 years earlier, are evidence that, perhaps thanks to mediation through the Assyrian community in Uruk, the bond between Assur, his city, and his people had survived the destruction of the temple, the downfall of the Assyrian empire, and the demise of an entire era.

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Further Reading

No comprehensive assessment of Assyrian religion from the beginnings of Assyrian history to the downfall of the Assyrian empire is currently available, but Lambert 1983 provides a valuable, albeit short discussion of the changing images of the god Assur throughout this period. The only monographic treatment of Old Assyrian religion, Hirsch 1961, remains useful but is now very dated. Holloway 2002 provides the most comprehensive treatment of the relationship between religion and politics in the Neo-Assyrian era. Menzel 1981 studies Assyrian temples and Maul 2000 the most important festival cycle in Ashur during Neo-Assyrian times.

Notes

- ¹ This chapter was translated from the German by Shana Zaia, with revisions by the editor of this book.
- ² It should be noted, however, that Jürgen Bär has collected arguments for an early structure possibly dedicated to Assur that could have stood at the site of the later Assur temple in the Early Dynastic period (Bär 2010).

- 3 Note that the name of Nippur's principal god, Enlil, is included in the writing of his city (EN.LÍL^{ki}).
- 4 We do, however, have accounts that Assur took to traveling. From inscriptions of Esarhaddon it is known that Assur, Ištar of Arbela, and other gods followed an "invitation" of the king on the occasion of the dedication of the new armory (*ekal māšarti*) of Nineveh (Borger 1956: 63, Episode 23, cf. also Borger 1996: 255, § 17: Assur and Mullissu at the dedication of the New Year's House of Ištar in Nineveh).
- 5 One of the oldest examples of this is provided by the seal of the ruler Šilulu (Grayson 1987: A.0.27).
- 6 Ass. 21506e, 16–17 reads: *i[l]-pi-nu SIG₄/kab-tu-te še-e^b-ru-te*
DUMU.MEŠ LUGAL (collated).
- 7 É-ḥur-sag-gal-kur-kur-ra, the Sumerian ceremonial name for the cella of Assur.
- 8 See KAR 142, obv. 1.

CHAPTER 19

Assyrian Literature

Alasdair Livingstone

This chapter provides a brief introduction to literary texts written in the Assyrian language or covering topics that are specifically Assyrian, with a focus on the Neo-Assyrian period. The rich Babylonian literature that was studied in Assyria is not covered here.

The bulk of Assyrian literature that has come down to us is from the Neo-Assyrian period, substantially but not exclusively from the Assurbanipal libraries, but there is a limited amount of material from earlier periods that also needs to be discussed. As will be seen, despite much literature that is Assyrian in its content and cultural orientation, there is a general indebtedness to Babylonian literature, and key aspects of this indebtedness can already be seen in the earliest periods. A rich source for both Assyrian and Babylonian literature is Foster (2005), which supplies English translations as well as a brief introduction to each text and separate annotations. The principal source for Neo-Assyrian literature is Livingstone (1989) with both editions and translations and a brief introduction and notes. All the texts described below are to be found in one or the other of these two sources.

Old Assyrian Period

The most important work of Old Assyrian literature that has come down to us so far is a well preserved and substantial text of sixty-three lines from Kültepe (Kaniš) that describes the deeds of the Old Akkadian king Sargon. It was once thought to be a parody (Van De Mieroop 2000: 133–59 and Foster 2005: 71–5, “Sargon, Lord of the Lies”) but it has now been shown by Dercksen (2005: 107–29) that this results from misunderstanding of the text. By placing the text in the Old Assyrian cultural and linguistic context in which it belongs, Dercksen also demonstrated the manner in which this text stands at the head of a tradition of Assyrian historical and epical-historical royal literature that flourished above all in the first millennium BCE. The text is in the first person, with Sargon himself speaking. He owes his strength to the god Adad, swears by Ištar, “Lady of Combat,” and “talks with the gods.” With the strength of Adad he takes possession of “the land” from “East to West.” The text is not lacking in hyperbole. Sargon does battle with seventy cities in one day; his standing army numbers 7000, with an additional 3000 runners, and he has a

thousand cupbearers. He recounts how with this entourage he defeated and humiliated a whole sequence of tribal groups in Anatolia. In the final summary paragraph he claims to have touched three cardinal points of the heavens with his hands.

Since the language of the text is Old Assyrian and it was found among a sea of mercantile documents at Kaniš, it is legitimate to include it under the rubric of Old Assyrian literature. Dercksen points out, however, that all the metaphors and similes contained in the text have parallels in Old Akkadian and Neo-Sumerian royal historical and literary texts, and that its central themes are well founded in the literature that grew up in Mesopotamia around the deeds of Sargon of Akkad. He emphasizes that although we only know the text from the Old Assyrian colony where it was found, it could go back to an original from the heartland of Assyria, or even be an Old Assyrian translation or adaptation of an original Babylonian prototype. Dercksen points out that this background of cultural borrowing also applies to the few Old Assyrian incantations that are known and that, together with the present text, constitute all that is known of literature from the Old Assyrian period.

Middle Assyrian Period

Middle Assyrian literature is only slightly more diverse in its content, consisting as so far known only of an epic about Tukulti-Ninurta I (plus a few fragments of similar epics regarding the reigns of other kings), a short martial poem, dubbed by Foster “The Hunter,” and some royal hymns and associated material.

The Epic of Tukulti-Ninurta I (Foster 2005: 298–317) commences with a paean of praise to the king himself and the god Ashur, moving on swiftly to the king’s previous exploits. After a lacuna the main subject of the epic, the wars in Babylonia, is introduced by accusing the Kassite king Kaštiliaš of behavior such as would annoy the gods of Babylonia and make them less likely to protect the land. Following some badly preserved text, captured Babylonian merchants accused of spying in Assyria are brought before the king, who magnanimously releases them. After a warning to Kaštiliaš, the attack on Babylonia proceeds with devastating results and the confiscation of numerous cuneiform texts that are brought to Assyria. The language of the epic is graphic and the course of events recounted in a lively style. The “Hunter” (Foster 2005: 336–7) is a short epic text recounting the violent campaigning of an unspecified Assyrian king, most likely Tiglath-pileser I, in the mountain lands.

There is a short hymn to Tiglath-pileser I celebrating his military prowess, but the best preserved Middle Assyrian hymn is from the reign of Aššurnāṣirpal I,

from the mid-11th century BCE (Foster 2005: 327–30). The speaker and supplicant is the king himself; the goddess invoked at the outset as “she who dwells in the temple Emašmaš” is Ištar of Nineveh. Her divine genealogy is established, and that she exercises all kingship. After additional standard epithets, the king declares that he is to bare his soul to the goddess. The king presents himself as the sustainer of her cult, including making abundant the beer she so loves. There then follows an extensive passage drawing from the righteous sufferer genre of cuneiform literature. In spite of being the chosen one and having been diligent in all his duties the king has become afflicted with disease. He has lost his appetite; alcohol is disgusting to him, and this is only part of his malaise. There is then a final section in which Aššurnasirpal implores Ištar of Nineveh to restore him to health and beseeches her to take his part with her beloved Assur, father of the gods. A second poem is also certainly in the voice of Ashurnasirpal I, and probably likewise directed to Ištar of Nineveh (Foster 2005: 331–3).

Neo-Assyrian Period

The Neo-Assyrian tradition of “literature” in the strict sense begins under Sargon II, who commissioned a hymn to Nanaya with blessings for himself (Livingstone 1989: no. 4). True to type for the warrior king the hymn dwells on the warlike aspect of the goddess’s character as well as the essential nature of her involvement in all human activity.

The hymn to the city of Uruk (Livingstone 1989: no. 9) and the blessings and celebrations for the Assyrian metropolis towns of Assur and Arbela (Livingstone 1989: nos. 8 and 10) represent a small but distinct genre also known from a few texts from Babylonia. The Uruk hymn takes the form of an address to Uruk and other Mesopotamian cities. The voice of the speaker in the Uruk hymn is not revealed but declaims, “O Uruk! I love Esagil (the temple of Marduk in Babylon), the house of my veiling!” It is therefore a female one and since it also declares that Babylon is her father’s house and cries out: “O Uruk! I love Borsippa, house of my kingship! O Uruk! I love Ezida, along with Nabû!,” it must be the voice of Tašmetu, whose father-in-law was Marduk of Babylon. The purpose of the hymn is syncretistic but also political: Tašmetu loves not only Babylon and Borsippa but also the other cult cities of Babylonia together with their respective deities, and the Inner City, that is to say the city of Ashur, together with the god Assur, Nineveh, along with Mullissu, Arbela, also with Mullissu, Kalbū along with Ninurta, and Harran along with Šîn. The liturgy goes on to explain that the fires of the temples of Uruk and Babylon consume her and that she ponders the affairs of Uruk in her heart. The work as a whole relates to a type of thinking current from the times of the late Kassite dynasty onward that seeks to use one deity

as a focal point for others. From a political and propaganda perspective a paean to the city of Uruk such as this one – and in Neo-Assyrian dialect to boot – can only relate to the pivotal position occupied by Uruk in the Assyro-Babylonian political quagmire.

The blessings and celebrations for the other two cities, Ashur and Arbela, are much more straightforward in character as can be seen from some short extracts: “Arbela, O Arbela, Heaven without equal, Arbela! City of festivals, Arbela! ... Its foundations are as firm as the heavens. ... Tribute from all lands enters into it. ... Those who leave Arbela and those who enter it are glad. ... The Lady is seated on a lion, on a [...]; mighty lions crouch beneath her!” The blessings for Ashur, the only extant manuscript of which belongs to the reign of King Esarhaddon as it mentions his name, are no less exuberant but focus on events within the city that would directly involve the citizens themselves: “May joy of the heart be established; let constant joy come in, come in! Pour oil into skull-sized containers, pluck countless amounts of wool, increase the bread, make abundant the beer! ... Release the hand of the [...], draw the weak into the breath of the gods, let the harvest of the land be good! ... It is the day of the race of Nabû, it is a day of Ayyar, a favorable month. On your right and on your left, while traversing the streets of his city, while deciding the decisions of the city, wherever we enter there is abundance and prosperity! The city rejoices at the roads that we pass!”

The remaining hymnic material centers on King Assurbanipal and includes praise poems on Ištar of Nineveh, Nanaya, and the god Assur. The signature pieces however are a coronation hymn to Assurbanipal (Livingstone 1989: no. 11) and an acrostic hymn of the same king to Marduk and Zarpanitu (Livingstone 1989: no. 2). There is no reason to doubt that the coronation hymn was composed on the occasion of Assurbanipal’s accession to the throne and the idea is supported by internal evidence. It is known that 669 BCE coincided with a period of unusual prosperity in Assyria and this is reflected in an exhortation within the hymn that the people of Assur enjoy low prices with specifics given for the three main staple goods, grain, oil, and wool. Although our knowledge of Neo-Assyrian literature is primarily rooted in the contents of the late libraries, the existence of a centuries-long tradition is seen once again here, since passages of Assurbanipal’s coronation hymn echo passages in a short Middle Assyrian coronation hymn embedded in a complex and much longer ritual.

The coronation hymn concludes with an independent, ruled off passage consisting of three sections of text in which “he,” presumably the priest, pronounces blessings as he opens the censer placed before Šamaš. The first is a blessing in which the five male gods Anu, Enlil, Ninurta, Nergal and Nusku each give to Assurbanipal an attribute appropriate to his own office. This is followed by a section of curses against those who would harm or threaten Assurbanipal. The third section calls on the “gods of heaven and earth” to

gather and bless “king Assurbanipal, the circumspect man,” and to “place in his hand the weapon of war and battle and give him the black-headed people, that he may rule as their shepherd.” The first section is closely paralleled by a text on a Babylonian tablet from Assur where it is juxtaposed to another Babylonian text that speaks of the creation of “the king, the circumspect man.” Whether the idea of the separate creation of the king apart from the rest of humanity would have been interesting to Assurbanipal and his scholars must remain a matter of speculation, but the occurrence of the phrase “the king, the circumspect man” in both texts may not be a coincidence. In the main part of the coronation hymn the emphasis is on Assur and Šerua, whereas the Babylonian deities Marduk, Zarpanitu, and Nabû are missing. The ruled off section, however, is a nod to the ancient gods of Babylonia.

In Assurbanipal’s acrostic hymn to Marduk and Zarpanitu the acrostic reads: “I am Assurbanipal, who has called out to you: give me life and I will praise you!” The hymn is well preserved and the total compass of almost seventy lines gives the author latitude to ring the chains on Marduk’s attributes, achievements, and greatness from a first millennium BCE perspective. Just to give a few examples, post *Enūma eliš* it is Marduk who is the creator god and it is he who rescued the cosmos from chaos by slaying the Anzû monster-bird. Tying in with rationalizing trends in first millennium BCE theology, he bears the attributes of the greatest gods of the early second millennium BCE, Anu, Enlil, and Ea, here Ninšiku. Holding fast the tablet of destinies, it is he who has raised Assurbanipal to supreme temporal power. There is also reference to Assurbanipal as the wise king, with an epithet alluding again to the notion of the “circumspect man” known from the coronation hymn. At the end of the text, the king describes himself as a “humble, pious scholar,” reflecting his literacy.

Neo-Assyrian literature includes a small amount of elegiac poetry (Livingstone 1989: no. 12–16). There is an elegy in memory of a woman and one mourning over the death of Tammuz, both Neo-Assyrian in language. Also to be discussed here are three other texts of elegiac type from three other genres well known in Mesopotamian literature, the righteous sufferer, a dialogue, and love lyrics. In twenty lines the elegy in memory of a woman (Livingstone 1989: no. 15; George 2010) is a short but effective piece of literature. The woman, in childbirth, is “cast adrift, like a boat in midstream.” Her crossbars are broken, tows cut, and her face veiled as she crosses a river, probably an allusion to the river of death; she flashes back to her happiness as a young bride but then remembers how her plea to the mother goddess to save her life went unheard so that death slunk into her bedroom and set her feet toward the land of no return. The Tammuz elegy (Livingstone 1989: no. 16) does not actually mention the god but fits into the genre. At fifty-seven lines it is much longer than the previous text and is also more complicated and obscure in its allusions. The text is divided into eight sections, each of which

has its own point of focus within the overall theme of lamentation and despair, and may be a series of excerpts. Parts of the text are poorly preserved. The better preserved sections speak of a faithful Babylonian merchant who has come to grief while other sections chart the destruction of a household, the cutting down of canebrakes, forests, and orchards. Consistently throughout the text the language is striking and abrupt. The love lyrics, between Nabû and Tašmetu (Livingstone 1989: no. 14), are in Neo-Assyrian dialect but use imagery familiar from older Mesopotamian love poetry: love games precede the entry into the bedroom, Tašmetu's thighs are a gazelle in the plain, her ankle bones an apple of the month Siman. The righteous sufferer's prayer to Nabû (Livingstone 1989: no. 12) is also in Neo-Assyrian dialect and pursues motifs familiar from the genre as known from Babylonia. The dialogue between Assurbanipal and Nabû (Livingstone 1989: no. 13), on the other hand, belongs to those texts that develop themes in the nature of the king's relationship to his gods, in the present case Nabû and in particular Ištar of Nineveh. It is reasonable to assume that the connection with Nabû is bound up with the god's role as patron of writing and with Assurbanipal's own literacy, while references to Ištar of Nineveh and the Emašmaš continue the long tradition of the deity and the Assyrian kings' patronage of her temple.

Among the epic poetry in praise of Assyrian kings what might have been the most important text is also the least well preserved one (Livingstone 1989: no. 19). The text speaks in the first person of "treading the road of Tiamat" and "opening a gate of righteousness"; what is particularly significant, though, is the phrase "Assurbanipal opened his mouth (and spoke)." This is followed by reported speech addressing a female, most likely to be a deity and if so then Ištar. This shows unequivocally that at least an attempt was made by the scholars at Assurbanipal's court to produce an epic poem about his exploits following the muster of the traditional epic verse poetry of Babylonia found in Gilgamesh, the Epic of Creation, Erra, and elsewhere. The remaining royal epic texts are in elevated prose. The text Shalmaneser in Ararat (Livingstone 1989: no. 17), stemming from the provincial Neo-Assyrian library at **H**uzirina, modern Sultantepe, commences with an invocation to Ištar of Nineveh and recounts the events of the campaign in an epic style that differs from the annals, even including orders by the king in the first person to his general and an exhortation of his men to bravery. One poorly preserved text (Livingstone 1989: no. 18) recounts a campaign by Sargon II, and the remaining three texts that are sufficiently preserved to yield connected sense tell of Assurbanipal's wars in Elam (Livingstone 1989: nos. 20–2).

The epistolary art was cultivated at the Neo-Assyrian court; many routine letters addressed by scholars at the court to the kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal demonstrate literary flair as well as erudition. Apart from these, however, there are a number of letters that follow a different format and are best classified as literature. Primacy among these must be attributed to a group

of six letters that follow the conceit that they were composed and addressed by the god Assur to specific Assyrian kings (Livingstone 1989: nos. 41–7). In their conceptualization these letters recall the Eighth Campaign of Sargon II, which takes the reverse form of a letter to the god Assur and is written in vivid poetic language. While no letter from Assur to this king is preserved, the six texts referred to above are primarily responses to information received about the kings' military achievements on campaign. The oldest is a letter from Assur to Šamši-Adad V of which the extant text is divided into three sections. The first two concern campaigns to Nemetti-šarri and Der in northern Babylonia, while the third addresses a campaign to Elam. Of the remaining texts three are too damaged to provide much hint to their content, two are responses by Assur to Assurbanipal's reports on his wars against his brother Šamaš-šumu-ukin and against Elam, while in the last Ninurta as Babylonian god of war addresses an indeterminate Assyrian king. The literary pattern of these divine letters is consistent. The god declaims: "As to what you wrote me" and then quotes the king's report on his activities, while interpolating comments such as "That happened at the command of my great divinity!" The existence of such letters is evidence of the complexity of the relationship between the kings of Assyria and their advisers and scholars, as well as the complexity of their perceived relationship with the gods. Apart from the divine correspondence there is a finely crafted letter to Assurbanipal from one of his sons (Livingstone 1989: no. 25), which includes well known religious motifs such as Šamaš and Ištar going at the king's right and left. The letter also includes more imaginative imagery: the king's military success is described in the terminology used for winning tactics in the royal game of Ur or a similar game.

A final group of Neo-Assyrian literary texts have previously, and perhaps wrongly, been loosely aligned under the rubric propaganda (Livingstone 1989: nos. 29–33).¹ These include two curious pieces of invective concerning a named Babylonian individual, a text about Assurbanipal's defeat of the Elamite king Teumman and the Assyrian annexation of Elam, and the texts conventionally known as the Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Crown Prince, the Sin of Sargon and the Marduk Ordeal. Within the corpus these are the most difficult texts since their contents are deeply embedded in the complex religion and politics of the period but also the psyche – often convoluted – of rulers who were struggling to hold together a dynasty and an empire.

The two pieces of invective against the Babylonian, Bel-eṭir son of Ibaya, a notorious freedom fighter and thorn in the side of the Assyrian crown (Livingstone 1989: nos. 29–30), take the form of literature and are full of scurrilous language. Political references and the mention of the names of Elamite princes who were being educated and indoctrinated at the Neo-Assyrian court show that these texts belong to the reign of Assurbanipal. The

first is presented as belonging to the genre of “*narû* literature” – taking on the conceit that it was originally written, prophetically, on a stele (*narû*) – and citing in its opening lines the Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sîn, the message of which was not to undertake hostilities. The second is presented as if it were an incantation. Here, interspersed with political references, the language is even more vituperative. Bel-eṭir is not only a raped captive with runny and squinting eyes, he is an “unspecified deadline, shit bucket of a farter, servant of a dead god, house whose star has disappeared from the heavens,” and much more.

The Teumman text (Livingstone 1989: no. 31) must also be mentioned here since it reflects a similar psychological disposition and differs in several respects from other texts dealing with the exploits of Assyrian kings treated above. Unlike in the royal epical texts, where these exploits are recounted in the third person, in this text Assurbanipal himself speaks and the voice is a human one that lacks the bombast of the annals. The historical background was that Assurbanipal had attempted reconciliation with the Elamite princes and even at times sent famine relief to Elam but was now confronted with a revolt and even the taunt, “But he (Teumman) [mustered] the forces of Elam and marched on, saying ‘I will not [sleep] until I have come and dined in the centre of Nineveh!’” Assurbanipal’s response was to pray in some confusion to Ištar of Arbela – apparently the attack had occurred at the precise moment when the king was in Arbela attending her cult. At any rate, after a great battle at the River Ulay the native Elamite polity was destroyed forever and the Elamite princes who had been trained and indoctrinated in Assyria installed as puppet rulers there.

The Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Crown Prince (Livingstone 1989: no. 32) is one of the longer Neo-Assyrian literary texts, with a total of seventy-five lines, but unfortunately the middle of the obverse is poorly preserved. After a short lacuna the text opens with a reference to one who frequented the place of work of the extispicy priests and took counsel with them and with “wise registrars who guard the secret of their lords.” As we then learn, this individual was in the position to appoint governors and magnates and to strengthen the watch over his own property, therefore either a king or a crown prince overseeing the royal business of his father. There follow some obscure references to personal events relating to this individual that cannot be placed in a further context especially since the next twenty-five lines are extremely poorly preserved. However, in the middle of the badly preserved section, an individual is named, Kummaya. There is mention of entering a temple, planning to go down to the underworld, and of setting up a censor. When connected text sets in again Ereškigal, the queen of the underworld, is addressing Kummaya, who wakes up startled and confused. He then lays down to sleep and sees a night vision; there follows a long section of text in which the denizens of the underworld are mentioned by name one by one and

their appearance described, beginning with Namtar, god of fate, and his spouse. This section is highly reminiscent of, and may have been inspired by another Babylonian text that is significantly longer but does much the same thing, naming with awe and describing in detail the appearance of the denizens of the underworld. Nergal, Ereškigal's spouse, then appears to Kummaya, who kisses his feet. This would have resulted in Kummaya's death had not Išum, Nergal's vizier, intervened on his behalf. The remaining text is extremely dense but very rich in content. The references to the *akītu* house on the plain and the garden of abundance likening Mount Lebanon make it certain that the corpse of Sennacherib makes an appearance, while the description of a second individual, still alive, closely fits the persona of Esarhaddon. Kummaya is then Assurbanipal. This agrees with the references to frequenting the workshops of extispicy experts and priests, which can be brought into association with Assurbanipal's education as crown prince and his intense interest in even the most obscure scribal *esoterica*. The lines quoted above are followed by another bout of agony and stress on the part of Kummaya. What is certain is that the broader background to the text is the fear and dread that had been caused at the Assyrian court by Sennacherib's murder, following as it did on the death of Sargon on the battlefield.²

Two further Neo-Assyrian texts that can loosely be classified as literature but have some of the characteristics of political vignette also belong to the conflict between the pro-Assyrian and pro-Babylonia parties at the Neo-Assyrian court. The hard line policy of the anti-Babylon party implemented with drastic effect by Sennacherib had been supported by appropriate propaganda in his royal inscriptions, and with Esarhaddon's decision to restore the cults in Babylonia, including that of Marduk in his temple Esagil, and eventually to create a kind of parity between the two lands by having them each ruled by one of his sons, clear and forceful counter-propaganda was needed. In this context the text perhaps confusingly known as the Sin of Sargon (Livingstone 1989: no. 33) is the main piece. This text has been the subject of an extensive discussion (Tadmor et al. 1989). While it is clear that the purpose of the text is to justify religious and political policies already determined on by Esarhaddon and his followers of the pro-Babylon party, the conceit of the text is that Sennacherib speaks from the dead saying that he had collected groups of haruspices to independently investigate through extispicy the reasons for the death of Sargon on the battlefield and the non-recovery of his body for proper burial in Assyria. Extispicy deals only in yes or no answers and the question was whether Sargon has esteemed the gods of Assyria over those of Babylon (or perhaps rather vice versa), and there was of course a reliable answer in the affirmative. From a propaganda point of view the beauty of this is that the correctness of Esarhaddon's planned policies are projected back to mistakes ostensibly made by the founder of the Sargonid line, thus making it unnecessary to deliberate on Sennacherib's actual policies. Like the warning to Bel-eṭir discussed above, the Sin of Sargon harks back to the Cuthean

Legend of Naram-Sin, appropriately since the Legend concerns a king who was portrayed as coming to grief because he ignored instructions from the gods.

A further literary text involving the religious and mythological crises that transpired in the wake of Sennacherib's destruction of Babylon and the Esagil, as well as once again the deportation of the Marduk statue to Assyria, is that known as the Marduk Ordeal (Livingstone 1989: nos. 34–5). This takes the form of an explanatory text, that is to say that it superficially resembles a commentary, but rather than commenting on an established text it produces gobbets of information reflecting known practices or beliefs and then provides them with an explanation or interpretation. The text exists in two versions, each of just over seventy lines; the content is varied in scope but there is a clear focus on the cult of Marduk in Babylon and the cults of those of the deities close to him: Zarpanitu, Nabû, and Belet-ili. The interpretations turn the legitimate cult of Marduk on its head: the house of the New Year's festival is now a place of ordeal where Marduk is questioned; Nabû comes from Borsippa because his father has been imprisoned; Zarpanitu, whose hands are stretched out in supplication to Šîn and Šamaš, is in fact praying that Marduk may live. The whole is underpinned by dense theology. Thus, Marduk's deeds in the Epic of Creation were in fact done for Assur and at his behest and the Epic itself is actually about his imprisonment. There is also scurrilous treatment of the cult. For example, reeds that were thrown in jubilation in the path of Nabû when he came from his own city, Borsippa, to Babylon are now soiled reeds from a pigsty.³

Finally, some fragmentary pieces of literary work that are in Neo-Assyrian dialect or pertain to the royal court need to be brought forward since in different ways they form a sort of vignette on the literature discussed above. The first, in Neo-Assyrian dialect (Livingstone 1989: no. 48), is actually a ritual with an accompanying incantation for childbirth but with a literary bent. That it is in dialect, that it comes from the Assurbanipal libraries, and that it does not show an affiliation with relevant medical and related material from the stream of tradition make it seem at least not impossible that it should be associated with the work of the court physicians who tended the royal children. Another text (Livingstone 1989: no. 51) reminds us of the reality of court life, the wheeling and dealing and jockeying for position. Written in the second person it accuses an unnamed individual of "dark things," of slander, and "pocketing a shekel." On a more positive note there is a short text of only eleven lines, and of which the whole of the left hand side has been broken off, that even in that small compass draws together several features of Neo-Assyrian literature and its production (Livingstone 1989: no. 49). It speaks in one line of Gilgameš, "a royal work of art," and in the next of a scribe of Borsippa, dwelling in the Inner City (Assur) or dwelling in Arbela, and immediately afterwards "the temple, the House of Emašmaš." Male scribes

with writing boards and styluses tied to their waists are followed by a reference to a single female figure, presumably a goddess of writing, and equipped with similar accoutrements.

The overriding features of Neo-Assyrian literature that emerge are clear. It had a discernable history of several centuries before its blossoming in the Sargonid period and especially the reigns of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, and within this tradition there was always a core of texts that centered around the persona of the king. Especially in the later period there is an intense literary intervention in the affairs of the day, especially religious politics, but one that bears inspiration from the older Mesopotamian tradition. Perhaps what is most striking, however, within what is such a small corpus is the sheer variety and the different types of vitality that are shown.

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Further Reading

Much less has been written about the ancient literature of Mesopotamia than about the literatures of many other areas in the ancient world. Foster (2005), referred to above, provides a kaleidoscope of translations from all periods of Akkadian. A further contribution by Foster (2007) is useful for placing Assyrian literature within its wider context of Akkadian literature, Akkadian being understood in the larger sense to include not only Old Akkadian, but also Assyrian and Babylonian. Despite its title, *Akkadian Literature of the Late Period*, this book is not limited to the very latest period of Mesopotamian culture, but takes a first millennium BCE perspective. The classic statement on Akkadian literature is Reiner (1978), a book that also includes chapters on Sumerian, Hittite, and other ancient Near Eastern literatures.

Notes

- 1 A new assessment will be provided by the present writer elsewhere.
- 2 The text has been discussed by Ataç (2004) and Sanders (2009), among others.
- 3 A differing interpretation is provided by Frymer-Kensky (1983).

CHAPTER 20

Assyrian Scholarship and Scribal Culture in Ashur

Nils P. Heeßel

The beginnings of Assyrian scholarship are largely obscure. Evidence preceding the 13th century BCE is scant and whether or not a distinctive Assyrian tradition of scholarship existed before this time is still a matter of debate. In the early second millennium BCE, Assyrian entrepreneurs established trading colonies in Anatolia and made the town of Ashur a hub in the long-distance trade (see the overview by Veenhof and Eidem 2008). While thousands of sales documents, letters, and lists have been found in the excavations of the main trading colony Kaniš, very few literary texts from this period have come to light. They include a tale about Sargon of Akkad (see [Chapter 19](#)), short incantations against the demoness Lamaštu (von Soden 1956; Michel 1997; Ford 1999) and a black dog (Veenhof 1996), and a letter to the goddess Tašmetum (Kryszat 2003). References to scholars or to scholarly activities in letters and other documents of daily life are rare. Apart from a few mentions of female diviners and ecstasies, divination, ritual lore, and other religious and scholarly endeavors play almost no role in Old Assyrian letters (Hirsch 1961: 72, 81).

Assyrian Interest in Babylonian Scholarship

The picture changes dramatically in the Middle Assyrian period. In the 14th–12th centuries BCE, the Assyrians began to take a lively interest in Babylonian scholarship, which they took over, adapted, and developed. This new interest in scholarly knowledge might, in part, be connected to the new style of Assyrian kingship: the kings believed increasingly in strengthening their power through knowledge. Babylonian scholarship was by no means an end in itself. It served the stability of the state and the well-being of its citizens and, in particular, the well-being and power of the king, who held the most important position in Mesopotamian society as the leader of the state and the intermediary between the worlds of the gods and of humankind. The knowledge the texts provided regarding ritual interaction with the sphere of the divine, obtaining or retrieving ritual purity and divine benevolence, recognition of the divine will through divination, the possibility of appraising the outcome of any action by extispicy (the study of animal entrails), and

more, was thought to enhance the stability of the state and its ruler. At that time, Babylonia was at the forefront of scholarship, Babylonian Akkadian was the lingua franca for the entire Near East, and Babylonian knowledge was adopted in Elam, Syria, the Levant, and even in the royal courts of Hattuša and Tell el-Amarna. It is no wonder, therefore, that the Assyrian kings developed an eager interest in this scholarly literature and tried to secure it also for Assyria (Pongratz-Leisten 1999).

The most striking evidence for this new interest is found in a passage of the so-called “Tukulti-Ninurta Epic,” a highly poetic literary text recounting how the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233–1197 [1243–1207] BCE) defeated his Babylonian opponent Kaštiliaš IV and describing the conquest and depredation of the capital Babylon (Machinist 1978; Foster 2005: 298–317; Jakob 2009). The text includes a lengthy list of booty taken from Babylon to Ashur that mentions clay tablets containing scholarly knowledge, among them exorcistic texts, prayers to appease the gods, collections of extispicy omens and other divinatory texts, medical treatises, and inventories. According to the epic, the looting of tablets was so complete that “not one was left in the land of Sumer and Akkad” (Foster 2005: 315). Of course, this extreme claim can be seen as literary hyperbole, yet the many Middle Babylonian scholarly texts found in excavations in Ashur illustrate the fact that Babylonian tablets with scholarly knowledge did find their way to the Assyrian capital, where they were studied and incorporated into Middle Assyrian libraries (Weidner 1952–3). The Babylonian tablets found in Ashur may indeed have been the ones mentioned in the “Tukulti-Ninurta-Epic,” brought to Ashur by the command of the king, even though it is also possible that they were acquired, at least in part, through more peaceful means as scholars in different cities exchanged their texts and traveled long distances to copy tablets (Frahm 2012).

Middle Assyrian Scholarship

Evidence for scholarly activity before Tukulti-Ninurta, especially from the 14th and early 13th century BCE, the early, formative phase of an independent Assyrian territorial state, is still scant, but the fact that King Aššur-uballiṭ’s (1353–1318 [1363–1328] BCE) personal scribe was of Babylonian origin can be seen as a hint toward an increasing interest in scribal lore as it existed in Babylonia (Jakob 2003: 7 and 244). Furthermore, historical texts and letters show that extispicies were carried out for the Assyrian kings Adad-nirari I and Shalmaneser I. But it is the aforementioned passage in the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic that demonstrates the Assyrian interest in the entire range of scholarly texts in the Middle Assyrian period for the first time.

Among the Middle Babylonian tablets found in Ashur, divinatory texts

constitute the largest part, making up roughly 40 percent of all texts. Within this group, by far most prominent are extispicy texts, detailing the hermeneutic principles of interpreting specific features of sheep's livers, lungs, entrails, and other organs. The next largest corpus is the lexical texts, while prayers, hymns, fables, laws, and medical texts make up the rest of the tablets (Weidner 1952–3: 200). This distribution does not deviate from other contemporary or later Mesopotamian libraries. It is, on the contrary, quite typical, representing the broad spectrum of intellectual pursuits Mesopotamian scholars were engaged in.

The scholars in Ashur did not content themselves with simply copying and handing down the Babylonian texts, but rather adapted and reworked them for their own needs. This can be shown clearly for some new Middle Assyrian text series, especially in the case of extispicy and lexical texts rewritten by scholars in Ashur. A Middle Assyrian lexical text that is similar to (yet displays distinct variations from) the 21st tablet of the lexical texts series named *ur5-ra* = *ubullu* indicates that there was a Middle Assyrian version of this series (Horowitz 1988; see also Veldhuis 2014: 317–53). Within the Middle Assyrian extispicy corpus from Ashur, a distinct Assyrian text series can be substantiated as well. The relevant tablets have catch-lines at the end of the text that refer to the first line of the following tablet, thereby forming a sequence of tablets, i.e., a text series. Both with regard to the format of the text and the selection and sequence of omens, this Middle Assyrian extispicy series shows similarities to the later, widely used extispicy series *bārûtu*, yet it also differs from it, particularly in the sequence of tablets. For example, a Middle Assyrian text similar to the later eighth tablet of the sub-series “If the lung” of the *bārûtu* series has the catch-line not of the ninth but of the tenth tablet of that series. Another Middle Assyrian text similar to the later tenth tablet of the same sub-series “If the lung” bears the catch-line of the seventh tablet (Heeßel 2012: 14). This illustrates to what extent the Assyrian scholars adapted and reworked the Babylonian tradition.

While the Assyrian scholars relied heavily upon the Babylonian tradition, they also authored specific Assyrian texts and text genres. First and foremost among these were long and complex royal inscriptions relating the military activities of a king. Although the heyday of the genre was the Neo-Assyrian period, the earliest examples of royal inscriptions dealing elaborately with the campaigns of a king date back to Adad-nirari I (1295–1264 [1305–1274] BCE). From the same reign stems the first example of the distinct Assyrian literary genre of the royal epic, celebrating the exploits of specific kings. Most of these royal epics are extant in a quite fragmentary state. One of the better-preserved examples is the still rather incomplete epic of Tukulti-Ninurta I, about his conquest of Babylonia, which goes to great lengths to illustrate the ingenuity and might of that king. Possible models for the creation of the Assyrian royal epics are the Old Babylonian legends of the Old Akkadian

kings (Foster 2005: 107–21). This distinct emphasis on the Assyrian kingship evident in royal inscriptions and epics can also be traced in the Assyrian royal hymns, prayers, and psalms.

The Alleged Royal Library of Tiglath-pileser I

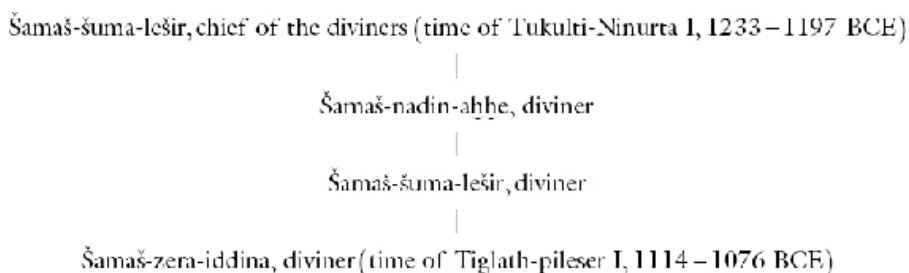
Most of the Middle Assyrian and Middle Babylonian scholarly texts from Ashur were excavated in the southwestern court of the Assur Temple, in area HD10V and the adjacent areas. The southwestern court, called the “court of Nunamnir,” dates from the extensive reconstruction of the Assur Temple by Shalmaneser I (1263–1234 [1273–1244] BCE). Most of the tablets were found along the northwestern wall and in adjacent rooms of the court, as well as in its northwestern gate, which was presumably called the “Enpi-gate” (Pedersén 1985–6, II: 12f.). It is likely that they all belonged to a library originally situated in or above the “Enpi-gate” and that the tablets crashed to the ground during the destruction of the city in the year 614 BCE. Ernst Weidner, who was the first to call attention to this library, considered it to be a state archive and library that was founded by Tukulti-Ninurta I as a collection of his Babylonian booty and expanded by Tiglath-pileser with Assyrian tablets (Weidner 1952–3). The interpretation of the texts from the southwestern court of the Assur Temple as the royal library of Tiglath-pileser I has met with criticism. Wilfred G. Lambert rejected the idea of a royal library since the colophons of the tablets indicate a private origin, and he proved the alleged creation of the library by Tukulti-Ninurta to be founded on a highly problematic text restoration (Lambert 1976: 85f. fn. 2). Helmut Freydanck showed that many of the tablets, especially those with lexical content, which were formerly dated to the reign of Tiglath-pileser I, were actually written forty to fifty years before his accession to power (Freydanck 1991: 95f., 225). While these corrections to the view proposed by Weidner substantiate doubts about a direct royal endowment for this library, its official character is evidenced in that it was situated within the most important Assyrian sanctuary. What remains uncertain is whether the tablets were originally part of private libraries and only later incorporated into the collection above the “Enpi-gate” or whether they were indeed “official” tablets, directly written for the library.

The problem of identifying the original depository of these Middle Assyrian scholarly texts raises the fundamental issue of “private versus official” in the ancient Near East and is related to the fact that we know very little about the scholars who wrote the texts, apart from the sparse and often ambiguous information contained in the colophons. The closeness of some scholars to the court and the king is evident from titles such as “king’s scribe,” “king’s exorcist,” or “king’s diviner,” which were used in many colophons.

Furthermore, titles such as *rab bāri'ē* “chief of the diviners” and *rab āšipē* “chief of the exorcists” indicate a kind of rank order within the group of scholars at the court (Jakob 2003: 509–40). Unfortunately, the sources are silent about the remuneration of these scholars, or what kind of training they were expected to have received. Based on the naming of fathers and grandfathers who bore the same title in colophons of scholarly texts, we can assume that a scholar’s education would have been carried out within the family, the sons learning the craft of their father, as was customary in the ancient Near East.

Middle Assyrian Scholarly Families

Tracing the families of Middle Assyrian scholars back more than one or two generations is difficult, however. This is illustrated by the case of the diviner Šamaš-zera-iddina, who wrote at least four manuals about extispicy during the time of Tiglath-pileser I, all of which were found in Ashur and which name Šamaš-zera-iddina’s father, Šamaš-šuma-lešir. A diviner bearing the same name, Šamaš-šuma-lešir, is attested in a list of high-ranking officials during the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I, and Claudio Saporetti, considering the eighty-three years time span between the death of Tukulti-Ninurta I and the beginning of the reign of Tiglath-pileser I, surmised that this could be a case of ponymy – the grandson bearing the same name as the grandfather – a rather common pattern in Mesopotamia (Saporetti 1978). Furthermore, Saporetti proposed that the father of the younger Šamaš-šuma-lešir was a certain Šamaš-nadin-ahḫe, whom a colophon of an extispicy manual found in Ashur presents as the son of Šamaš-šuma-[broken], according to Saporetti the Šamaš-šuma-[lešir] from the time of Tukulti-Ninurta I. Thus Saporetti determined a sequence of four generations of diviners, all connected by the same theophoric element Šamaš in their names:



This elegant reconstruction, though convincing at first glance, presents several problems. On the one hand, as Stefan Jakob (2003: 526 fn. 92) notes, at least one more generation should be assumed between the second and third scholar, which would put into question that ponymy was at play. What is more, the

tablets of Šamaš-nadin-a^{bb} are written in Babylonian script and represent genuine Babylonian tablets, which were most likely not produced in Assyria but brought there from Babylonia. Therefore, Saporetti's attempt to connect the two families of Šamaš-zera-iddina and Šamaš-nadin-a^{bb} must be considered to have failed.

The few attestations of scholars in texts concerning daily life testify to their preeminent positions in society, showing, for example, that a diviner had to tend to the regular supply of sacrificial offerings to the Assur Temple using his own means, or that diviners were sent by the king on important missions (Jakob 2003: 524 fn. 81 and 528). However, the clearest evidence for the importance of scholars at the court might be seen in the fact that, at least from the time of Tukulti-Ninurta I onwards, the Assyrian kings, in accordance with Babylonian practice, kept their own personal scholars, the *ummân šarri* “king’s scholar.” Due to its closeness to the center of power and probably also because of its lucrateness, the position of personal scholar to a king was the most prestigious and coveted position within the scholarly community. The significance of the title *ummân šarri* is illustrated by the fact that the synchronistic king list from Ashur, which lists the kings of Assyria and Babylonia in historical order side by side, adds the name of important *ummân šarri* to the kings they served (Heeßel 2010: 164f.).

Thanks to the support provided by Middle Assyrian kings who were interested in scholarly knowledge, especially from Babylonia, Ashur evolved into a center of scholarship in which new texts and text genres were created and texts acquired from Babylonia were compiled into new text series. This development brought Assyrian scholarship into conflict with its Babylonian counterpart, as thenceforth no center of scholarship existed in Mesopotamia that was acknowledged both in Babylonia and in Assyria and thus could claim supremacy in this phase of serializing the most important scholarly texts. It is hardly surprising that, on the one hand, the new Assyrian texts and text series were not studied in Babylonia, and, on the other hand, later Babylonian innovations were not approved in Ashur. A telling example of this is the serialization of the medical-diagnostic and physiognomic texts by the Babylonian scholar Esagil-kin-apli, who worked as *ummānu* of the Babylonian king Adad-apla-iddina (1068–1047 BCE). His revised editions of already serialized texts were not used in Ashur, and it is very likely that they were even actively rejected (Heeßel 2010). At the same time, new works by Assyrian scholars did not enter the Babylonian tradition and had no wider impact.

The Scholars of Ashur between the Ninth and the Seventh Century bce

The city of Ashur suffered a major loss in significance when the Assyrian capital and seat of the court was moved to Kal^bbu, modern Nimrud, during the reign of Aššurnāṣirpal II (883–859 BCE). However, this was not a complete decline, as Ashur remained the place with the most important temple of the nation: the seat of Assur, the main deity of Assyria. And even if the king might have visited the city only for a few weeks each year in order to be present at high festivities, Ashur still remained the place where the Assyrian kings were buried. Furthermore, the Assyrian kings did not cease their building activities in the former capital and still maintained the many temples and palaces there. Nonetheless, Aššurnāṣirpal's move led to serious repercussions for the scholars of Ashur, since they lost not only their closeness to the court, but also had to witness the increasing influence that Babylonian scholarship had on the king and his entourage. In Kal^bbu, and then in Nineveh, where king Sennacherib (704–681 BCE) had relocated his capital in the seventh century, scholars received with great attention Babylonian texts and text series, especially literary, divinatory, and lexical works, while largely ignoring the Ashur tradition (Heeßel 2010). And yet, even if Ashur was no longer the place to be for ambitious savants, the city was still home to many families of scholars, some of whom served the king in leading positions at the temples.

Among the several libraries of Neo-Assyrian scholars brought to light by the excavations in Ashur, the collections of the scribe Nabû-a^bbu-iddina and his son Šumma-balaṭ, as well as the collection of the chief singer Aššur-šumu-iškun, illustrate well the kind of professional texts that these scholars studied and with which they worked.

However, the most substantial, eminent, and complete private library found in Ashur, and probably in first millennium BCE Mesopotamia in general, is the library of the Baba-šumu-ibni family, whose members served as chief exorcists for the Assur Temple (Pedersén 1998: 81–4). The house of this family, which was situated in the middle of the town, was destroyed during the sack of Ashur in 614 BCE by the combined forces of Medes and Babylonians. The “bookshelves” in the library room collapsed and the tablets were scattered and broken on the ground.

The excavators found some 1200 texts and fragments from the library, most of them closely related to the activities of the exorcists who owned them (Maul 2003, 2010). The tablets were essentially compiled by three generations of scholars, Nabû-bessunu, his son Kišir-Aššur, and Kišir-Aššur's nephew Kišir-Nabû. Each held the title of *mašmaš bīt Aššur* “exorcist of the Assur Temple” at the height of their careers, as did Nabû-bessunu's father Baba-šumu-ibni; the office was apparently handed down within the family.

Furthermore, based on the titles these scholars use in the colophons of their tablets, it is possible to trace their professional career from “young assistant” and “assistant” via “young assisting exorcist” and “young exorcist” to “(full) exorcist” and, finally, “exorcist of the Assur Temple” (Maul 2010: 207–10). Through dated texts and a reference to Kišir-Aššur in a letter, we are able to date the period in which the tablet collection was compiled to around 690–614 BCE, the heyday of the Neo-Assyrian empire.

The library of the family of Baba-šumu-ibni contained the entire range of literature used by the exorcists to fulfill their main task: maintaining the welfare of the land and the people and preventing disaster, disease, and harm from befalling them (Jean 2006: 147–53; Maul 2010: 196–9). This included texts to appease angered gods, invocations and prayers in Sumerian and Akkadian, elaborate directions for ritual purity, and instructions for the performance of the regular temple cult and specific religious festivities. Quite a large number of texts in the library list ominous signs, whose perception and correct interpretation could warn the exorcist of divine displeasure before it took shape as disaster. *Namburbi*-rituals were used to alter a divine judgment, which manifested itself as a calamity in an omen, and to reconcile those affected by bad omens with their gods. If averting the danger in advance had not been successful, exorcists used compendia that included detailed healing instructions for all kinds of diseases and rituals for counteracting demons, ghosts, and witchcraft, which could cause disease and misfortune. Lists of plants, stones, and other types of materia medica, some of which delineate their pharmaceutical effects, illustrate the exorcist’s close relationship with the art of healing as well. Rituals for the protection of temples, palaces, houses, and livestock from attacks by demons, witches, and other malicious powers show that exorcists attended not only to humans but also to their property. Several rituals covering such diverse themes as enhancing the revenue of a tavern, bringing back a runaway slave, winning the affections of someone loved, sobering a drunken man, or overcoming the estrangement of long-separated individuals attest to all kinds of magical manipulations that the exorcist used to answer the needs of his clients. Commentaries on rituals, prescriptions, and divinatory treatises, which explain the subtleties of difficult scholarly texts, demonstrate the academic interests of the Baba-šumu-ibni family. A manuscript of the widely used “manual of the exorcist” (Geller 2000), which compiles all of the texts that were mandatory for the teaching and studying exorcists were engaged in, proves how complete the library of the Baba-šumu-ibni family was; two-thirds of the works mentioned in the manual can be shown to have been part of it.

In addition to the texts directly related to their profession, the library of Baba-šumu-ibni’s descendents includes myths and fables, lexical lists, Sumerian-Akkadian dictionaries, and collections of old cuneiform signs used at the end of the third millennium BCE. Sometimes, certain texts provide insight into

special duties carried out by the members of the family, as in the case of the many new ritual texts regarding the New Year festivities in Ashur. Much space is also devoted to historical-religious questions, perhaps in reaction to the fact that, as a result of the conquest of Babylon, the Assyrian state cult was reorganized. Archival texts from the library that deal with the management of the Assur Temple indicate that the scholars, in addition to their professional duties, also fulfilled more mundane tasks in the administration. For example, Kišir-Aššur and his relatives kept records regarding the issuing of offerings for sacrifices during festivities and the distribution of rations for workers employed by the temple.

Unfortunately, we have no information on the sources of income the family of Baba-šumu-ibni had, or other financial advantages that came with their office as chief exorcists. Furthermore, since only a limited part of the area occupied by their house was excavated, we do not know how large and prosperous their residence was. It is, therefore, impossible to evaluate the financial situation of the family. At the very least, the finding of several brick boxes below the floor that still contained the magical figurines deposited there when the house was built reveals that the exorcists followed their own advice in protecting their home against demons, diseases, and other evil by placing magical figurines at precarious points in the house, just as it was detailed in ritual texts found in their library.

It is evident from texts in the library of the Baba-šumu-ibni family, as well as from other Neo-Assyrian scholarly texts, that scholars in Ashur were in direct contact with colleagues in other Assyrian scribal centers, especially in Nineveh, either copying for them or exchanging tablets with them. Kišir-Aššur himself is mentioned in a letter of the highly influential “temple-enterer” Akkullanu, who reported that Kišir-Aššur was busy copying the lexical series *Ur-ra = ^bubullu* for Assurbanipal’s library in Nineveh (Villard 1998). An astrological commentary from Nineveh can be shown to have been written either by Kišir-Aššur or by his nephew Kišir-Nabû (Frahm 2004: 47 fn. 18). Other Nineveh texts, including a section of an extispicy commentary (Koch-Westenholz 2000: 137 no. 19/32) and an invocation to Ištar (Gurney et al. 1936/37: 368f., pl. 6, line 8), state in their colophons that they were written according to originals from Ashur. It is, moreover, noteworthy that two manuscripts, one from Nineveh and one from the library of the Baba-šumu-ibni family, of a divinatory text concerned with the ominous results of the observation of ants exhibit the scribal remark “broken” in exactly the same six places in the text. Both tablets must have been copied from the same Babylonian original, which illustrates that Ashur and Nineveh shared their knowledge (Heeßel 2007: 6f.). Incidentally, we also learn from this that Ashur, even after losing its outstanding position as the center of Assyrian scholarship, which the city had enjoyed since Middle Assyrian times, was still a place where scholarly activities of some significance took place. It is for a

reason that Sargon II (721–705 BCE), in his highly poetic and learned account in which he describes his eighth campaign, praises Ashur as the “city of wisdom and intellectual insights” (Pongratz-Leisten 1997: 101).

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Further Reading

On scribal culture in general, see Pearce 1995 and (with a focus on the relationship between kings and scholars) Frahm 2011. For useful overviews of the libraries and archives in Ashur, see Pedersén 1985–6, and 1998: 80–8, 132–43. Maul 2010 provides an excellent analysis of the Baba-šumu-ibni family and its library. For an investigation into the possible rivalry between Assyrian and Babylonian scholars, see Heeßel 2010. Wiggermann 2008 traces the story of a particular Babylonian scholar taking refuge in Assur.

CHAPTER 21

Assyrian Scholarship and Scribal

Culture in Kal^hu and Nineveh

Jeanette C. Fincke

Introduction

The Neo-Assyrian period saw a profound change in the attitude of the Assyrian kings towards scholarship and scribal culture. The rulers of earlier periods had, by and large, left the responsibility of preserving scholarly knowledge to the temples and private individuals. This was the situation in Kal^hu (Nimrud), the Assyrian capital of the ninth and eighth century BCE. Aside from the state archives that were later moved to the new capital and the archives of the palace and city administration of Kal^hu (Pedersén 1998: 145–51), the only library with literary and other scholarly texts discovered in Kal^hu was found in the temple of Nabû, divine patron of scribes, which was called Ezida (but see also below, “Assembling tablets for Assurbanipal’s library in Nineveh,” for the library of Nabû-zuqup-kenu).

About 280 clay tablets and fragments were unearthed in the Ezida, largely in one room (Wiseman and Black 1996). Most of them were large library tablets with one or two columns on each side; a few had three columns (CTN IV 56, 63, 79) and one four (CTN IV 62). There were also lexical lists with more than four columns and usually only one word in each column. On smaller tablets in landscape format (i.e. written parallel to the long axis), we find excerpts and other, shorter texts (CTN IV 29, 59, 104?, 127, 149). The tablets identified so far (see [Table 21.1](#)) prove that the temple of Nabû also served as a school for teaching the scribal arts, like other temple *scriptoria* in the Ancient Near East. The group of school tablets (39 = 13.93 percent) from Ezida is the third largest group of texts found in this library; only the divinatory texts (ca. 90 = 32.14 percent) and the instructions for medical and magical treatments of sick people (76 = 27.14 percent) are more numerous. There are only twenty-five (=8.93 percent) religious texts, a genre one would have expected to be the most essential in a temple library, revealing that priests learned their profession not by reading relevant texts but rather through oral transmission.

Table 21.1 Text genres found in the Neo-Assyrian Libraries in Kal^hu, H

uzirina, and Nineveh (here only the ones written in Babylonian ductus)

	<i>Libraries</i>	<i>Ezida, Temple of Nabû in Ka'bu</i>	<i>Library of šangû-priests in Huzirina</i>	<i>Assurbanipal's Library in Nineveh: Texts in Babylonian Ductus</i>
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<i>Text genre</i>	<i>Number of Texts (percentage)</i>	<i>Number of Texts (percentage)</i>	<i>Number of Texts (percentage)</i>	
Divinatory Texts including Hemerologies	ca. 90 (32.14)	40 (9.83)	728 (46.64)	
(Divination reports)	1		637	
Medical and Magical Treatments of Sick People	76 (27.14)	76 (18.67)	78 (5.00)	
Religious Texts	Prayers and Hymns	19 (6.79)	51 (12.53)	135 (8.65)
Ritual Texts and Incantations	6 (2.14)	108 (26.53)	237 (15.18)	
Various Religious Texts			202 (12.94)	
Literary Texts	11 (3.93)	52 (12.78)	44 (2.82)	
Miscellaneous	21 (7.50)	19 (4.67)	22 (1.41)	
School Texts	39 (13.93)	28 (6.88)	56 (3.58)	
Fragments	ca. 18 (6.43)	33 (8.11)	59 (3.78)	
Total	ca. 280 (100)	407 (100)	1,561 (100)	

The purpose of the library was to preserve the knowledge of the past and to maintain scholarship and scribal culture. The library facilitated engagement in divination, which was not only considered a means to see into and influence the future (see below, “The growing role of divination and scholarship for the Neo-Assyrian kings”) but, at the same time, was also regarded as a science (Maul 2003). Divination started to become a text-based endeavor in the early second millennium BCE, a development that intensified after 1500 BCE, especially in the peripheral areas of Mesopotamia. There, people learned Akkadian as a foreign language by following the Mesopotamian school curriculum, in which divinatory texts formed the largest (Hattuša: 35.31 percent, Emar: 60.77 percent) or the second largest (Ugarit: 20.97 percent) group of texts within the corpus of Akkadian and Sumerian compositions of

Mesopotamian origin (Fincke 2012).

In the temple library of Nabû in Kal^hu, there is clear proof that Babylonian scholars played a certain part in the scholarly discourse. Fourteen tablets of the temple library are written in Babylonian ductus (5 percent), including three school texts. Moreover, one of the scribes, who served as the “royal scribe” of Adad-nirari III (810–783 BCE) and had very elegant Assyrian handwriting, was the son of Babilaiu, “the Babylonian.”

Libraries of Neo-Assyrian Scholars and Temples

In addition to temple libraries, there were private libraries created by individual scholars. In a letter to King Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE) written around 670 BCE, the king’s exorcist Adad-šumu-ušur apologizes for not having answered the king’s inquiry earlier because he was occupied with other duties in the palace, and then says, “the writing-board was in my house. Now then, I can check the writing-board and extract the relevant interpretation” (SAA X 202 obv. 10–13). One particularly well-known private library from the Neo-Assyrian period, besides that of the Baba-šumu-ibni family in Ashur (see [Chapter 20](#)), is that of a family of *šangû*-priests in ^Huzirina (Sultantepe), in the west of the Assyrian empire in modern Turkey. According to the colophons of the tablets, the priests created this library between 718 BCE and 612 BCE, in the final period of the Assyrian empire. They produced large library tablets with one or two columns on each side, smaller tablets with excerpts, and a few landscape-format tablets. The only tablets with more than two columns were lexical lists. The more than 400 unbaked tablets from the Sultantepe library were found next to the outer wall of a private house, provisionally hidden behind large wine-jars and stones. Towards the end of the empire, the situation for Assyrians living in remote districts of the empire might have become so dangerous that the owners decided to abandon their home, and these tablets might have been left in the street because the process of moving the library was interrupted by military attacks.

The composition of the library of the *šangû*-priests in ^Huzirina differs considerably from the temple library of Nabû in Kal^hu (see [Table 21.1](#)). In ^Huzirina, most of the texts (159 = 39.06 percent) are religious, followed (as in Kal^hu) by instructions for medical and magical treatments of sick people (76 = 18.67 percent), and then by literary texts (52 = 12.78 percent). The school texts, although fewer in number (28 = 6.88 percent), provide evidence for scribal education within this intellectual environment. But the library was focused primarily on the professional needs of its owners and not as much on

representing the complete knowledge of the time as was the case with the Ezida temple library in Kalb. The number of tablets written in Babylonian duktus is significantly smaller than in the Ezida (6 = 1.47 percent). However, since the tablets excavated seem to represent only a part of the library, the overall picture might change considerably if the remaining tablets were ever found.

The Growing Role of Divination and Scholarship for the Neo-Assyrian Kings

Towards the end of the eighth century BCE, a change in the attitude of the Assyrian kings towards scholarship can be observed. Around this time, the kings began to focus more and more strongly on the detailed knowledge of their scholars in order to enhance and maintain their royal power (Pongratz-Leisten 1999). According to the general belief, gods decided not only the general fates of everyone and everything on earth, but also determined every minute event in every person's day-to-day life. Knowing the gods' plans beforehand, therefore, meant knowing the future. This knowledge enabled the initiate to prepare himself for events to come, or even to prevent a bad prediction and thus influence the future (Maul 1994, 2003). Rulers with access to divinatory knowledge tried to use it to avoid military and political failure and to be always victorious and powerful. Obviously, they relied on scholars who were able to interpret the ominous signs by which gods indicated their plans.

According to the available sources, Sargon II (721–705 BCE) was the first Neo-Assyrian ruler who paid massive attention to the potential of divination. He especially focused on celestial signs, which are interpreted in the omen series *enūma anu enlil* (Wiseman 1955, SAA VIII 501, SAA XV 5).

Sennacherib (704–681 BCE), Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE), and Assurbanipal (668–631 BCE) were in constant contact with numerous diviners and exorcists, either in person or by correspondence, in order to detect every possible sign wherever it appeared and to discuss an appropriate course of action. They also consulted specialists in hemerology about the most suitable times for various actions in the cultic, military, and private spheres. A

hemerology distinctively composed for the Assyrian ruler, called *inbu bēl ar* i, "Fruit, Lord of the Month," is mentioned in a letter to Esarhaddon (SAA X 221 rev. 7, written 669 BCE).

In order to receive as much information as possible about potentially ominous events, especially celestial ones, the Assyrian kings hired Assyrian and Babylonian diviners "to keep the watch" for them in different places within the empire and to report to them their observations. The cities that are named

are Ashur, Nineveh, Arba'il, and Kalzu in Assyria, as well as Borsippa, Kutha, Uruk, Dilbat, Babylon, and Nippur in Babylonia (Oppenheim 1969: 101–7). As a result, a steady flow of reports and letters must have come to the palace in Nineveh (Kuyunjik), the Assyrian capital after 704 BCE. At present, about 567 such reports (SAA VIII) and 402 related letters (SAA X, SAA XVI 157–74) have been identified. The reports and letters were not dated by the sender but the content can indicate the time of composition. Of the datable material, all but one of the reports (SAA VIII 501 dates back to 708 BCE) and all of the relevant letters were written during a thirty-three year period from 680–648 BCE. Of the 120 datable reports written to Esarhaddon and to Assurbanipal, the majority (seventy-two) were for Esarhaddon (SAA VIII: XXI–XXII) and he received an even greater proportion (201 from a total of 247) of the relevant letters (SAA X: XXIX). Esarhaddon is said to have developed a daily routine to deal with the vast amounts of incoming information:

They used to receive and introduce all reports from the astrologers into the presence of the father of the king, my lord. Afterwards, a man whom the father of the king, my lord, knew used to read them to the king in a *qersu* (a private garden) on the riverbank. Nowadays it should be done as it (best) suits the king, my lord.

(SAA X 76 obv. 11 – rev. 9, written to Assurbanipal in 667 BCE)

Several specialists were appointed in various places at the same time with the same task – to send their reports to the king – so that the possibility of fraud was minimized. But fraud still happened. The Babylonian scholar Bel-ušeṣib wrote to Esarhaddon:

In the reign of your royal father (i.e. Sennacherib), Kalbu the son of Nabû-eṭir, without the knowledge of your royal father, made a pact [with] scribes and haruspices, saying: “if an untoward sign occurs, we shall [tell] the king that an obscure sign has occurred.” Whenever an untoward sign occurred, they interpreted tablet for tablet the [evil] away.

(SAA X 109 rev. 1–3)

This conspiracy came to light when the *alû*-demon seized Sennacherib and the king reproached the diviners: “[a sign] that is untoward to me occurs and you do not report it to me [...]” (rev. 6–7). Bel-ušeṣib informs Esarhaddon that, even under his reign, diviners had been “looking for an auspicious sign [..., saying]: ‘Keep *evil* [*ominous signs*] to yourself’” (SAA X 109 rev. 12–13). He himself, however, Bel-ušeṣib claims, is of course trustworthy and reports every single ominous sign, regardless of its meaning. Esarhaddon was alerted and, in the following period, if no report was sent to him for a while, made unpleasant inquiries (SAA X 45; 670 BCE). Consequently, scholars started to report everything that could feasibly be relevant, even on occasions when they were unable to see the night sky because of clouds (SAA X 138, 139). A system of reviewing reports developed that helped to avoid mistakes.

Ignoramuses who mixed up stars and sent incorrect reports were thus easily exposed (SAA X 51, 72, 172).

In order to provide the king with all necessary information, the reports and letters not only described the ominous signs but also quoted the relevant omens from the various series. An omen series was the scholarly way of arranging the rules or “laws” of divination (Fincke 2007). The ominous sign is described in the first clause of a conditional sentence (protasis) and the interpretation (or, more specifically, the expected outcome) in the second clause (apodosis). There were different omen “series” (*iškaru*), each of them focusing on a specific medium carrying the ominous phenomena, e.g. livers, animals, human beings, the earth, or the sky (Maul 2003). Omens not included in a “series” were called “outside(r), strange” (*abû*), but could be viable as well. “This (omen) is not from the *iškaru*-series; it is *abû*,” writes a scholar to Esarhaddon in 672 BCE (SAA X 8 rev. 8) and, similarly, “these (omens) are from the *iškaru*-series ... This (omen) is *abû*” (SAA VIII 147 rev. 5, 8). In order to give more credibility to an omen that was not quoted from a series, scribes referred to the oral tradition: “this omen is not from the *iškaru*-series; it is from the ‘mouth’ of the masters” (SAA X 8 rev. 1–2) or, more specifically, “this (omen) is from the ‘mouth’ of the mast[ers], when Nebuchadnezzar broke Elam” (SAA VIII 158 rev. 4–5). That quotations from the omen series or some other valid tradition were usually obligatory for reports to the king is explicitly stated in one of them: “perhaps the king my lord will say: ‘why did you not quote (any omens) from (the series) *šumma izbu* (i.e. anomalies)?’ There are no [...] in *what I* [...]” (SAA VIII 242 obv. 9–12). To emphasize the correctness of their observation, some scribes even quoted the astronomical series MUL.APIN (Hunger and Pingree 1989): “[The wri]ting-board (inscribed with) MUL.APIN says as follows: ...” (SAA X 62 obv. 13–15).

How the Neo-Assyrian Kings Obtained Access to Babylonian Scholarship

As a consequence of the new emphasis on divination, the late Neo-Assyrian kings’ attitude towards scribal culture in general changed as well. The rulers were increasingly concerned that consulting scholars for divination, as well as other specialists for their particular expertise, was not sufficient to meet all of their intellectual needs. Having immediate access to the original reference works became important to the kings as well, and so they started collecting cuneiform tablets and writing-boards with scholarly and literary texts. There is evidence of a library in the royal palace of Kalbū (Wiseman and Black 1996: 1), but since it was removed at some point, nothing about its content or focus is known. It most certainly included divinatory texts – we know that Sargon II

(721–705 BCE) had a polyptych made of waxed ivory writing-boards (Mallowan 1954: 98–9; Howard 1955), which was destined for a royal library in Dur-Šarrukin (Khorsabad), the king's newly founded capital in the north, but was found in Kalbū. The exterior of the polyptych was inscribed with the words: “palace of Sargon, king of the world, king of Assyria – he had the series *enūma anu enlil* inscribed on an ivory writing-board (and) deposited it in his palace in Dur-Šarrukin” (Wiseman 1955).

Any Neo-Assyrian king interested in collecting traditional cuneiform texts had to have access to Babylonian sources. Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE) employed Babylonian astrologers to observe the sky and report to him (see above, “The growing role of divination and scholarship for the Neo-Assyrian kings”) and also enlisted scholars with other areas of expertise. Some of them were Babylonian hostages who copied literary texts for the king under the supervision of Assyrian court officials (SAA XI 156), sometimes under duress: an administrative document states that the son of the governor of the Babylonian city of Nippur “has been put (back) in irons” (SAA XI 156 obv. 10) after completing his copy of a text series and before being assigned to another Assyrian official.

Access to the more advanced dimensions of Babylonian scholarship remained a privilege of the royal family and a restricted number of experts; a goldsmith of the queen's household was reported to the king for having bought a Babylonian slave from the market for the purpose of teaching his son exorcistic lore and celestial divination (SAA XVI 65). To strengthen his position and to ensure that nobody else had access to scholarly knowledge, Assurbanipal insisted on having the first choice of each and every scholar in the empire. A letter from Nabû-iqbi from Kutha to the king says: “(the lord of) kings, my lord, gave the [fo]llowing order to [a]ll the magnates: ‘whoever has a scholar in his presence but hides him fr[om the kin]g and [does not s]end him [t]o the palace, the king's [... will ...] him’” (SAA XVIII 131 edge 22 – rev. 6).

Babylonian scholars needed employment. When Marduk-šapik-zeri wrote a long letter to Esarhaddon reporting on celestial events, he offered him the services of himself and “in all, twenty able scholars ... who will be useful to the king my lord, and are guaranteed to meet the king my lord's desire”; among them were scholars “who [have *returned*] from Elam, [scribes (sc. astrologers), lamentation chanters], exorcists, diviners, and physicians” (SAA X 160 obv. 48–9, rev. 35–6; for the proposed dates of this letter see Fincke 2003/04: 118). Most of these scholars are said to have been experts in several disciplines, which must have enhanced their value to the king.

Once employed in the palace at Nineveh, Babylonian scholars wrote tablets for the royal library (SAA VIII 499) and taught their special knowledge to Assyrians. “The apprentices whom the king appointed in my charge have

learned *enūma anu enlil* (i.e. celestial omens),” a Babylonian scholar wrote to the Assyrian king (SAA X 171 obv. 8–10). But the scholars could also be appointed to do their duty elsewhere in Assyria (e.g. SAA X 164) or in Babylonia (Oppenheim 1969: 101–5). “Job applications” similar to that of Marduk-šapik-zeri were also written by Assyrian scholars, such as this one sent to Esarhaddon: “I am [an expert in] extispicy, tablets, writing reports, [and *things*] *beyond* (that)” (SAA X 182 rev. 30–1). To be selected for the royal entourage was not easy, even though the Assyrian court employed numerous experts from various places. An administrative text from the reign of Esarhaddon lists by name seven astrologers, nine exorcists, five diviners, nine physicians, six lamentation priests, three augurs, three Egyptian scholars, and three Egyptian scribes (SAA VII 1).

Each scholar employed by the Assyrian court, regardless of whether he worked in the palace in Nineveh or elsewhere, had to swear a loyalty oath (*adê*) when a new crown prince was nominated (SAA XVIII 83). The scholars – scribes, diviners, exorcists, physicians, and augurs – from various cities were summoned to Nineveh for the oath ceremonies (SAA X 6, 7), which meant that they had to interrupt their work. Nabû-nadin-šumi wrote to Esarhaddon in 672 BCE: “I could not perform the rest of the ritual (because) I had to leave for the *adê*” (SAA X 273 obv. 10–12). The *adê*-oaths imposed on scholars, like those for vassals (Parpola and Watanabe 1988), enforced the reporting of any conspiracies or hostile words against the king. With a rhetorical question, “is it not said in the *adê*-oath: ‘anyone who hears something (but) does not inform the king (will be punished)’” (SAA X 199 rev. 18’–21’), Adad-šumu-ušur, the king’s diviner, explains why he reported a plot against the king in 670 BCE. Scholars were also summoned to the Ninevite court for other reasons, wherever they were stationed in the Assyrian empire (SAA X 171).

Even though the palace in Nineveh was the most promising place for a scholar to find employment in Late Assyrian times, regular pay was not assured, as seen from many letters in which Babylonian and Assyrian scholars, more or less gently, complained about their poor living conditions (Frahm 2012). Moreover, scholarly work was often interrupted by other pressing duties. An Assyrian scholar warned the king: “because of the *ilku*-duty and the corvée work, we cannot keep the watch of the king and the pupils do not learn the scribal craft” (SAA X 143 rev. 3–8).

Employing Babylonian scholars at the Assyrian court did not stop the process of collecting tablets for the royal library from the main centers of Babylonian culture and scholarship. In his letter order to Šadûnu, governor of Borsippa, the Assyrian king, presumably Assurbanipal but possibly Esarhaddon (Frame and George 2005: 281–2), describes the exact procedure (CT 22, 1):

The day you read this tablet, take in your company Šumaya son of Šumu-

ukin, Bel-eṭir, his brother, Aplaya son of Arkât-ilani, and (all) the scholars of Borsippa whom you know and collect whatever tablets are in their houses and whatever tablets are kept in the temple Ezida: the tablets concerning the stone-amulets for the king, (those) concerning the watercourses, (those) concerning the days (i.e. hemerologies), (those) concerning the month *nisannu* (I), the stone-amulet(s) concerning the watercourses, (tablets concerning) the month *tašrītu* (VII), (those) concerning the (ritual) *bīt salā' mē*, ..., (those) concerning (success in) lawsuit, (those of) the “day,” (the set of) four stone-amulets for the head of the king’s bed and the feet of the king(’s bed), the “weapon of *ēru*-wood” for the head of the king’s bed, the incantation “May Ea and Marduk bring together wisdom for me,” (the tablets of) “Assembling,” the series (concerning) battle, as many as there are, including their additional single-column tablets, as many as there are, (the ritual) “that an arrow does not come near a person in battle,” (the rituals for) traveling through the open country and (for) entering the palace, the ritual procedure(s), hand-lifting-prayers, inscriptions on stone-amulets, and whatever (else) is good for kingship, (the ritual) “purification of the village,” (the ritual against) giddiness, (the ritual) “out of use,” and whatever might be needed in the palace – as many (tablets) as there are, also rare tablets that are known to you but do not exist in Assyria. Search for them and bring them to me! ... Nobody is allowed to withhold a tablet from you. And as for any tablet or ritual procedure that I did not write to you (pl.) about but that you (pl.) have discovered to be beneficial for the palace, you must take (them) as well and send (them) to me.”

(Fincke 2003/04: 122–3; Frame and George 2005: 281)

All of the compositions requested here belong to a corpus known as *āšipūtu*, “exorcists’ lore,” which comprises the prophylactic and apotropaic magical procedures that were vital for supporting and maintaining the health and power of the Assyrian king. The aim was to incorporate the tablets into the royal library for future reference. Priests and scholars would sometimes copy passages from the library texts for specific occasions. A letter from Esarhaddon’s chief exorcist, written in 670 BCE, states: “concerning the ritual about which the king said yesterday: ‘get it done by the 24th day!’ – we cannot make it; the tablets are too numerous, (god only knows) when they will be written” (SAA X 255 obv. 5–10).

Assembling Tablets for Assurbanipal’s Library in Nineveh

The Assyrian king who created Mesopotamia's largest and most important royal library is Assurbanipal (668–631 BCE). To realize this ambitious project, the king used tablets from both Assyrian and Babylonian libraries. Concerning the former, a case in point is the substantial library of Nabû-zuqup-kenu, a scribe and scholar from Kalbū who was active between 718 and 684 BCE, during the reigns of Sargon II and Sennacherib. His library ended up in Nineveh, most likely in the palace library (Lieberman 1987: 204–17). Nabû-zuqup-kenu was primarily concerned with divinatory texts, largely with celestial and meteorological omens from the series *enūma anu enlil*, but also with commentaries. A copy of Tablet 12 of the Gilgameš Epic, possibly written in response to the death of Sargon II (Frahm 1999: 79), was part of his library as well. Sometimes he copied from tablets and writing-boards that originated in Babylon, Borsippa, or some Assyrian city (Hunger 1968 nos. 293–313). It is most likely that his sons, Nabû-zeru-lešir and Adad-šumu-ušur, took Nabû-zuqup-kenu's library with them when they moved from Kalbū to Nineveh, where, under Esarhaddon, the former son became the king's chief scribe and the latter son the king's diviner. Eventually, the library was apparently incorporated into Assurbanipal's own tablet collection.

In 655 BCE, the priest and scholar Akkullanu asked Assurbanipal: “[and concerning what the k]ing, my lord, [wrote to me]: ‘let [*all the omens*] be *e[xttracted]*’ – should I at the same time [copy] the [tab]let of non-canonical [omens of wh]ich [I spoke? Or should I write them] on a *secondary* tablet? [Wh]at is it that the king, my lord, [orders]?” (SAA X 101 rev. 1–6). At about the same time, Assurbanipal reportedly tried to get hold of tablets from Babylonian libraries, a process already illustrated by the letter to Šadūnu quoted above. While the Assyrian king was still on good terms with his brother Šamaš-šumu-ukin, the king of Babylon (who started an insurrection against him in 652 BCE), Assurbanipal wrote to scholars in Babylon asking them to copy tablets and to send them to him. He even offered the prospect of paying them for their efforts. The number of compositions Assurbanipal had in mind to be copied was quite considerable (BM 28825):

[To Assurbanipal ...] ..., (who) wrote [to us thus]: “[*(send to me)* ...] ... the entire corpus of scribal learning, the craft of Ea and Asalluše, [...], *šumma izbu* (omens from malformed births), *šumma ālu ina mēlē šakin* (terrestrial omens), the exorcistic corpus (i.e. rituals and incantations), the lamentation corpus, the song corpus, and all the scribal [learning, *as much as there is*, that is in the] possession of the great lord Marduk, my lord.” ... These twelve scholars (from Babylon) have stored in their minds like goods piled in a magazine (i.e. they know by heart) [the entire corpus of scribal learning, which] they have read and collated, ... [... and they have toiled day and] night (writing it all down). ... [... PN], my dear brother, who [...] 72 writing-boards of sissuo-wood from the [...] he got out ...

Around the same time, Assurbanipal must have sent similar orders to Borsippa, another Babylonian city famous for its scribal tradition (BM 45642):

To Assurbanipal, great king, mighty king: ... The dutiful citizens of Borsippa will carry out for the king their lord the instructions that he sent, as follows, “write out all the scribal learning belonging to the property of Nabû (the city god of Borsippa) and send it to me. Carry out the instructions completely!” ... We shall strain and toil day and night to completely carry out the instructions of our lord the king. We shall write on boards of sissoo-wood, we shall respond *immediately*. And regarding the writing-board in Sumerian, the glossary, about which you sent word, there is none but that in Esagil temple (in Babylon). Let inquiries now be made before our lord the king. [You should] send word to the citizens of Babylon ...

(Frame and George 2005: 268–9)

Apparently, Assurbanipal had to be satisfied with copies on writing-boards of the important compositions he had asked about. After the revolt of Šamaš-šumu-ukin in 652 BCE and the ensuing war between the two brothers, which Assurbanipal won four years later, acquiring Babylonian tablets entered a second phase, in which Assurbanipal received original tablets from Babylonia. Library records from 647 BCE found in Nineveh (SAA VII 49–56) list numerous compositions written on clay tablets as well as on wooden writing-boards that were acquired from various Babylonian and Assyrian scholars. Before the tablets went into the royal library, they were marked in ink with Assurbanipal’s name (see [Figure 21.1](#)). These acquisitions added a total of more than 1469 clay tablets and 137 writing-boards to the royal library (Fincke 2003/04: 125). While overall, according to the library records, tablets outnumbered writing-boards, for three text genres the opposite was true: medical texts (7 : 27) and lamentations (2 : 12) were written predominantly, and extispicy texts (69) exclusively on writing-boards. Many Babylonian writing-boards were apparently used by Assyrian scribes to make new copies (Hunger 1968 nos. 318–39 often), while others were stored with those written on site by Assyrian scholars (see e.g. SAA VIII 19, 499). Unfortunately, none of the writing-boards from Nineveh have survived the ravages of time.

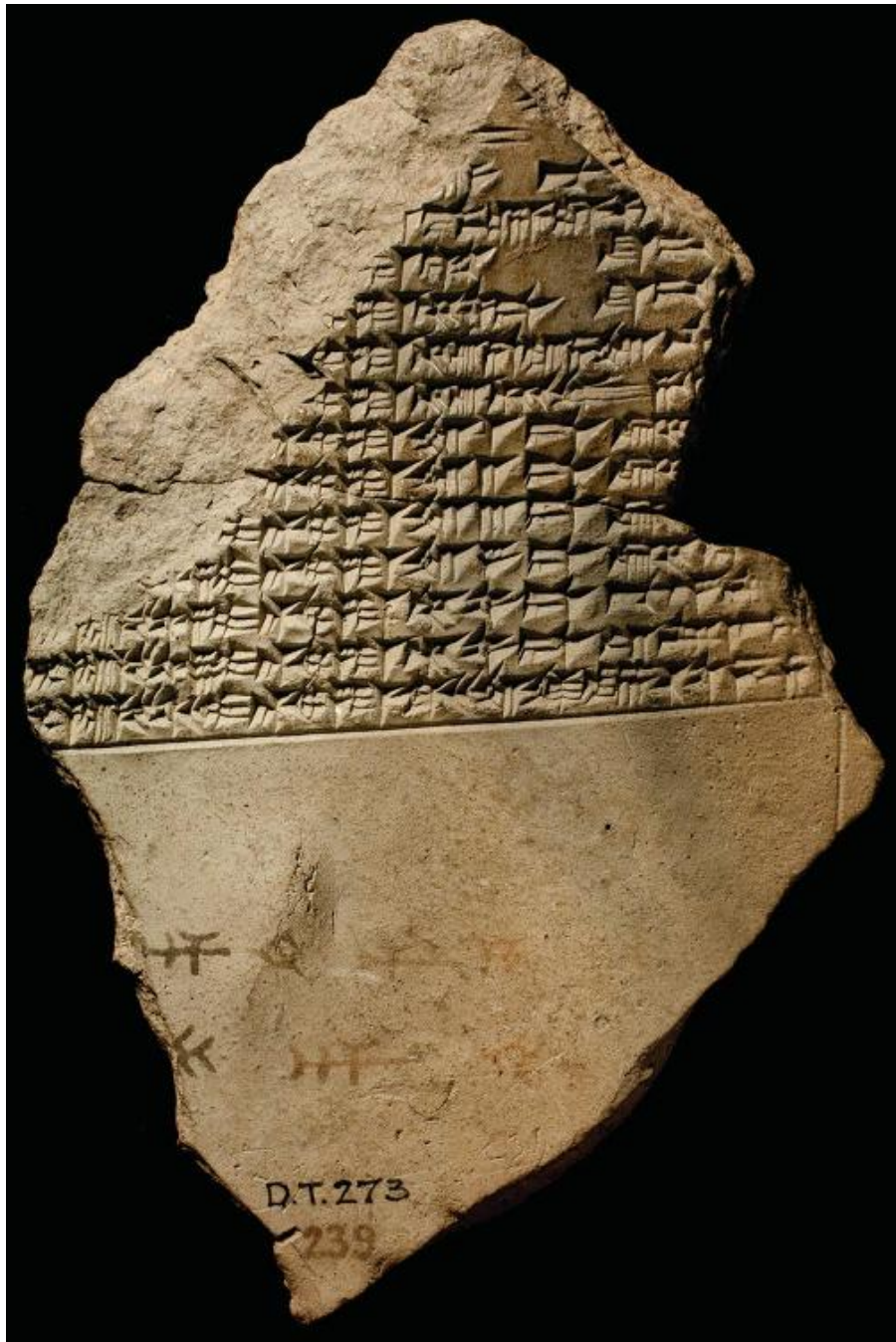


Figure 21.1 A colophon with the name of Assurbanipal added in ink on a cuneiform tablet from Nineveh. K. 11055 + D.T. 273.

Source: Reproduced with permission of the Trustees of The British Museum.

Like his father Esarhaddon, Assurbanipal appointed both Assyrian and Babylonian scribes and scholars to copy texts (SAA X 100, 101), and he even

supervised the layout of new tablets: “[concerning the] new tablets that are being written, [the king] has spoken [as] follows about us: ‘[...] ...; there is much space, there is much [...]. [As] sign *some* ten [...] lines and send them to me. I shall have a look’” (SAA X 30 obv. 8–13). The Assyrian king also made decisions concerning the contents of individual compositions: “The series should be rev[is]ed]. Let the king command: two ‘long’ tablets containing explanations of antiquated words should be removed, and two tablets of *bārûtu* (extispicy) should be put in (instead),” the chief diviner Marduk-šumu-ušur suggested to Esarhaddon (SAA X 177 obv. 15–rev. 6). The king decided which tablets of a series were worth keeping and even modified the wording of certain texts. One scribe wrote: “let me read the tablets in the presence of the king, my lord, and let me put down on them whatever is agreeable to the king; whatever is not acceptable to the king, I shall remove from them. The tablets I am speaking about are worth preserving until far-off days” (SAA X 373 rev. 4–13). Here, the scribe was not referring to letters or reports, which were more likely to be discarded than reviewed, but to literary texts. Another scholar referring to editorial work on scholarly compositions stated: “the king, my lord, should have a look; let them remove what is to be removed, and add what is to be added” (SAA X 103 rev. 1’–4’).

The idea of the king altering the wording of old texts contravened the prevailing norms of scholarship of the time, according to which literary and scholarly texts that survived from the past were considered the only true versions, created by gods, sages, or scholars of previous millennia (Lambert 1962). Consequently, no one usually had the authority to alter the established text. In their colophons, the scribes claim to have “copied (the tablet) according to its original and collated (the text)” or “copied, checked, and collated” it (Hunger 1968: 3–4). Many colophons refer to the place of origin of the tablet copied from, in order to emphasize its legitimacy (Hunger 1968: 6–7). The aforementioned textual interventions of Neo-Assyrian king were legitimized by their exalted status, far above that of a “normal” scholar and more akin to one of the “seven sages” (Pongratz-Leisten 1999: 309–11). Sennacherib was the first king who claimed that he had a “vast mind, equal to (the mind of) the sage Adapa” (OIP 2, 117 l. 4). Esarhaddon was also said to have acted like Adapa: “the deeds of the king, [my lord], are like those of (the sage) Adapa” (SAA X 380 lines 3’–4’). “[The king], my [l]ord, [is *as perfect*] as Adap[a],” as another letter has it (SAA XVI 169 rev. 9’), refers either to Esarhaddon or to Assurbanipal. Marduk-šumu-ušur, chief diviner of the king, flatters Assurbanipal by writing: “the king, lord of kings, is an offspring of a sage and Adapa: you have surpassed the wisdom of the Apsû and all scholarship” (SAA X 174 obv. 8–9). Assurbanipal himself, who was educated in the scribal arts when he was young (Livingstone 2007), describes his scholarly skills in an often-quoted inscription (L⁴, Livingstone 2007: 100–1):

I learned the craft of the sage Adapa, the secret knowledge, the whole of

the scribal craft. I can discern celestial and terrestrial portents and deliberate in the assembly of the experts. I am able to discuss the series “If the liver is a mirror image of the sky” with the (most) competent experts. I can solve convoluted reciprocals and calculations that do not come out evenly. I have read cunningly written text in Sumerian and obscure Akkadian, the interpretation of which is difficult. I have examined stone inscriptions from before the flood, which are sealed, stopped up, mixed up.

In one of his prism inscriptions, Assurbanipal reflects on the scholarly education that he received after being made crown prince and moving to his new residence in Nineveh. There, in the *bīt ridūti*, “I myself, Assurbanipal, learned the wisdom of (which the patron is) Nabû, the entire scribal art; I examined the teachings of all the masters, as many as there are” (Asb Prism A I 31–3; Borger 1996: 209).

As supreme scholars, the Assyrian kings made use of scholarship not only to protect themselves and their power, but also to establish their royal authority on other levels. Since scholarship was closely connected with religion and the king was closely connected to the gods, who had literally “chosen” and “nominated” him for kingship, Assyrian kings felt entitled in certain situations to also sponsor the rewriting of religious text. Sennacherib, for example, after destroying the city of Babylon in 689 BCE, revised the widely known Babylonian “Epic of Creation” (*enūma eliš*) as part of a religious reform instigated by him. The epic describes how the gods were created and how Marduk, the highest god of the Babylonian pantheon, finally prevailed in a battle against the primeval sea-monster Tiamat and created the world out of her. The other gods, in turn, chose Marduk as their king and made the Esagil temple, the residence of Marduk in Babylon, their favorite meeting place and the navel of the world. To make this story part of Sennacherib’s reform theology, the Assyrian scholars produced a new version: they replaced the god Marduk with Assur, the highest god of the Assyrian pantheon, and Babylon with Ashur, the religious capital of Assyria (Frahm 2010). Supreme divine power was, in this way, transferred to the highest god of the Assyrian pantheon, and the Assyrian king became the sovereign of the center of the world. This new version of the Epic of Creation clearly justified the Assyrian king’s rule over Babylonia and the rest of the world.

The Archaeology of the Royal Library in Nineveh

The written sources give us a good idea of the composition of the royal library in Nineveh, but the information needs to be correlated with archaeological findings. The ancient site of Kuyunjik (the main citadel of Nineveh) has been surveyed and excavated at various times since 1820 (Reade 2000: 392–4). Today, most of the famous sculptures and nearly all of the cuneiform tablets

from Nineveh are housed in the British Museum in London. When Austen Henry Layard began to work at Nineveh in 1846 and 1847, he found two rooms full of cuneiform tablets in the so-called Southwest Palace on Kuyunjik (Layard 1853: 345), the most important of the many discoveries of inscribed materials at the site. In the course of the years, large numbers of cuneiform tablets have been found on Kuyunjik in the Southwest Palace, the North Palace or *bīt ridûti*, the areas of the Iṣtar- and Nabû-Temple, and in some additional spots on and off of the mound (see [Figure 21.2](#)). As one would expect, none of the Nineveh libraries and archives have been found intact. When the Babylonians and Medes conquered Nineveh in 612 BCE, the looters destroyed most of the buildings with fire, especially the royal palaces and temples. When the buildings collapsed, the libraries, most of which had been located on the second floors of the buildings, crashed through the ceilings into the rooms of the ground floor. The tablet fragments were widely scattered, and in the Southwest Palace, pillagers seem to have kicked tablets about while roaming around the burning palace, adding to the chaos (King 1914: xii note 2). In addition, early excavators hardly ever recorded the exact places where the tablets were found. Only in a few cases, therefore, can the exact findspots of tablets be traced. Reade (1986) and Parpola (1986) have made the following general observations:

- The Southwest Palace housed a royal library, with many tablets using the shortest version of Assurbanipal's colophons (Hunger 1968 no. 317). The tablets have a rich red color, which might be the result of firing. This could have been done deliberately or happened during the looting of the city. Since most of the library texts were found on the floor in or near rooms XL and XLI, the library must have been on the second floor, above these rooms.
- The Southwest Palace also housed archival texts from the reigns of Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Assurbanipal.
- Since the scholarly and literary tablets that are known to come from the North Palace display longer versions of Assurbanipal's colophons (Hunger 1968 nos. 318–45), these tablets might represent a more “private” library of the king. In contrast to the red color of the tablets from the Southwest Palace, the clay of some of the tablets from the North Palace is light brown.
- The North Palace housed archival texts from the reign of Sargon II and the so-called post-canonical period (from the 640 s onwards).
- Most of the Old Babylonian tablets found at Kuyunjik are known to come from the Iṣtar-Temple.
- Some of the Middle Assyrian tablets and the tablets older than the seventh century BCE come from the area between the Iṣtar- and the Nabû-temple.

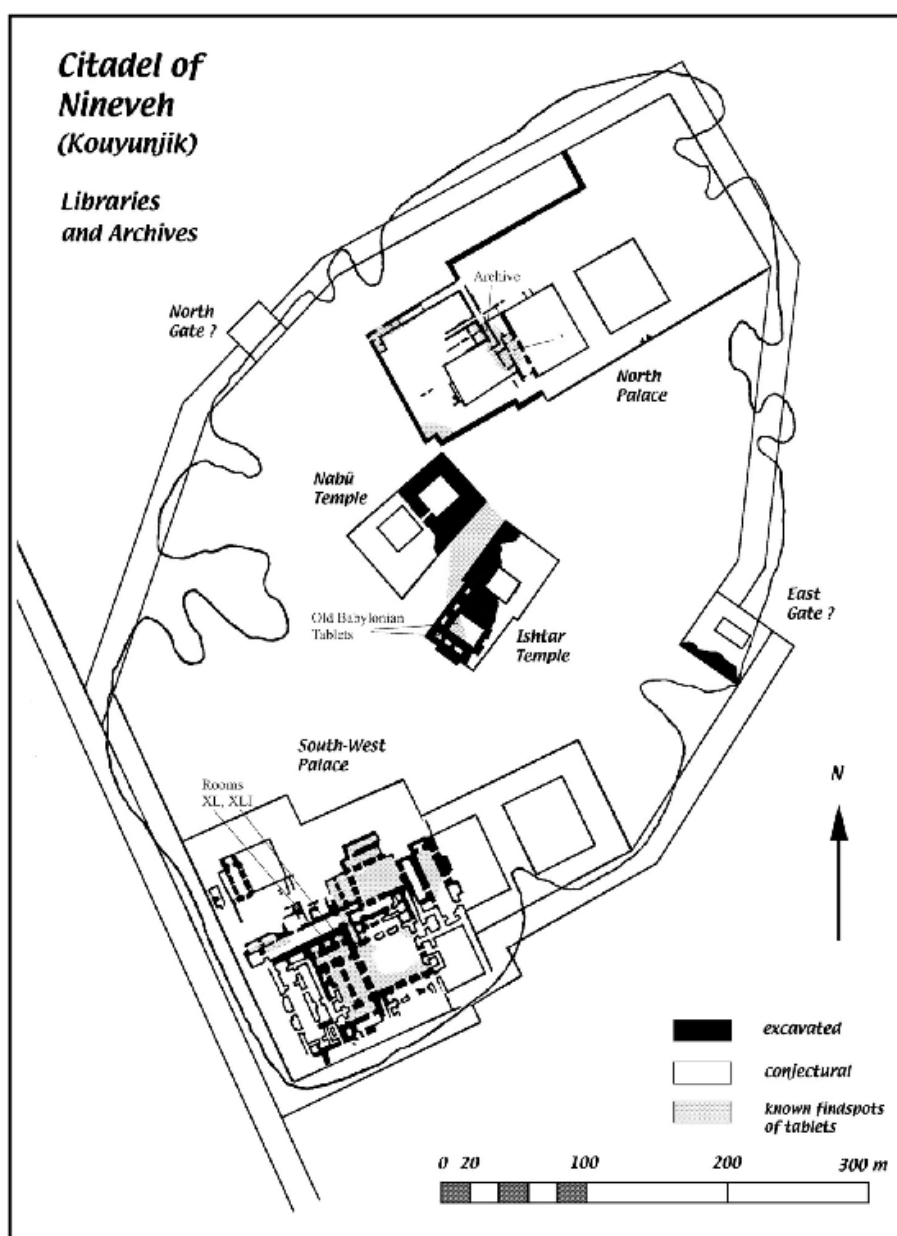


Figure 21.2 Libraries and archives located on Kuyunjik (drawn by J.C. Fincke, after Reade 2000: 407–18, 421–7, and Smith 1875: 94–102, 138–43).

It is obvious that the libraries of the temples of Ištar and Nabû (Reade 2000: 422–3) were the traditional old libraries of Nineveh, which corresponds to the situation in other Assyrian cities, e.g. Kalbū (see above, “Libraries of Neo-Assyrian scholars and temples”). Judging from the script of the tablets, the libraries of both the Southwest and the North Palace were, in contrast, newly established. They contained tablets written in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-

Babylonian ductus. Whether the Neo-Babylonian tablets were primarily acquired in Babylonia cannot be determined without further analysis of the clay of the tablets. They could, of course, also have been written by Babylonian scholars at the Assyrian court (Fincke 2014).

The Tablets of the Library Collection in Nineveh Written by Babylonian Scholars

Several problems prevent us from establishing an exact number for the tablets and tablet fragments from Nineveh that are housed in the British Museum. Firstly, many smaller fragments have still not yet been given a museum number. Secondly, the museum catalogues aggregate all inscribed clay objects – tablets, prisms, cylinders, and sometimes even pottery – into the same group. A short description of all of the inscribed pieces from Nineveh (about 34,900 altogether) is given in the seven catalogue volumes of the Kuyunjik collection that are published so far (Bezold 1889–96; King 1914; Lambert and Millard 1968; Lambert 1992). To give an idea of the number of tablets, the latest calculations provide figures between 30,300 and 31,000 items, excluding bricks (Reade 2000: 421). This is probably close to the real number, and so, for convenience, the figure of 31,000 tablets and fragments will be used for the following calculations.

It is difficult to say how many complete tablets this number represents. By assuming that, on average, one complete tablet comprises six fragments, we could propose that there were 5167 tablets at the time of Nineveh's destruction. But, since many of the smaller tablets did not break at all, at least not into rejoinable pieces, an estimated average of five or even four fragments per tablet seems more reasonable, giving a figure of 6,200 or 7,750 tablets. 5,949 pieces have been rejoined to other fragments (see www.fincke-cuneiform.com/nineveh/index.htm), so that the total number of tablets and fragments can be reduced to about 25,051 (i.e. 31,000 minus 5,949). In addition to scholarly, literary, and historical texts, this figure includes about 3,500 letters and administrative texts (published in the SAA series), tablets that one would more likely expect to be stored in archives, rather than in libraries (Pedersén 1998: 2–3). All these calculations may still not accurately reflect the actual size of the Nineveh libraries. It should be remembered that some tablets might have been removed from the libraries before the destruction of Nineveh. Furthermore, if we had access to the many wooden writing-boards that have not survived, our assessment of the numbers and types of texts collected at Nineveh would most likely be somewhat different.

With regard to the composition of the royal libraries at Nineveh, definite numbers can currently only be given for the tablets written in Babylonian

ductus. Of the 4,283 registered Babylonian tablets from Nineveh, 778 pieces have been rejoined to other fragments to date. So, disregarding the uncounted, tiny fragments and flakes, we can determine that there are 3,505 registered Babylonian tablets and fragments that were unearthed in Nineveh and are now housed at the British Museum. This figure comprises about 14 percent of the total number of 25,051 tablets and fragments found in Nineveh. It can be subdivided as follows:

Library texts:	1.561
Divination reports:	637
Archival texts:	1.068
Not classified	239

The Babylonian library texts found in Nineveh are either oblong, single-column tablets or large tablets with normally two columns on each side. Smaller tablets, either in portrait format (i.e. written parallel to the short axis) or landscape format (i.e. written parallel to the long axis), were used for excerpts and shorter texts. Tablets with three or more columns on each side, such as the ones that were found in Ashur and Kal^bbu (see above, “Introduction”), were used in Nineveh only for lexical texts and explanatory lists, and very occasionally for *Sammeltafeln* that combine texts normally written on several tablets (Fincke 2013: 584).

The library texts written in Babylonian ductus (see Table 21.1 above) consist primarily of divinatory (46.64 percent) and secondarily of religious texts (28.83 percent). This is in contrast to the libraries in Kal^bbu and H^uuzirina, where medical texts make up the second largest group (27.14 percent in Kal^bbu and 18.67 percent in H^uuzirina), whereas medical texts at Nineveh form the third largest group (5 percent). The texts transmitted by Babylonians were clearly focused on divination and religion, including rituals and prayers. This mirrors the information from the written sources about the acquisition of texts for the royal library in Nineveh (see above, “Assembling tablets for Assurbanipal’s library in Nineveh”).

Any research on divinatory texts in Nineveh must also consider the divination reports, small tablets written in landscape format. Strictly speaking, divination reports are archival documents (see the definition in Pedersén 1998: 3) and not library texts. However, they contain quotations from the official divination series, especially in the celestial divination reports (Fincke 2010: 35–9), which makes them almost as vital for further reference as the library copies of the divination series themselves. Moreover, the number of divination reports written by Babylonians (637) in relation to the number of divinatory “library” texts written in Babylonian script (728) highlights their relevance within the royal tablet rooms. Therefore, in the following overview (see also Table 21.2), both groups of texts will be discussed together.

Table 21.2 Divinatory texts from Nineveh written in Babylonian ductus

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<i>Kind of divination</i>	<i>Library texts</i>	<i>Divination reports</i>	<i>Total</i>			
<i>number</i>	<i>percentage</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>percentage</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>percentage</i>	
Celestial omens	343	47.12	330	51.81	673	49.45
Extispicy	112	15.38	285	44.74	397	29.17
Terrestrial omens	70	9.62	1	0.15	71	5.22
Series <i>iqqur īpuš</i>	6	0.82			6	0.44
Teratomantic omens	1	0.69			5	0.37
Physiognomic omens	1	0.27			2	0.15
Hemerology	1	0.14	4	0.63	1	0.07
Various divination	189	25.96	17	2.67	206	15.13
Total	728	100	637	100	1,361	100

Almost 50 percent of all divinatory texts from Nineveh written in Babylonian ductus belong to the group of celestial and meteorological omens. The reason for this is the nature of celestial ominous signs: they can be seen by everyone and provide predictions for the whole country and its people as well as for the king. This feature makes celestial omens the preferred means by which the king could prepare for events of more than regional significance. Extispicy was a means of answering specific questions and referred only to the individual enquirer. That the king used this tool regularly can be seen from the high number of reports concerning questions asked in specific extispicy procedures (SAA IV), 44.74 percent of all divination reports. The writing of such reports was introduced to the Assyrian court by Babylonian experts. As the Assyrians took over the practice, some features were changed (SAA IV: XIII–XIV; Fincke 2003/04: 117–18). The earlier texts, written solely by Babylonians and commonly called “oracle inquiries,” date to the reign of Esarhaddon. They are distinctly pillow-shaped and begin with an address to the Sungod: “Šamaš, great lord, give me a firm positive answer to what I am asking you.” When Assyrians gradually took over the practice, they initially signed the reports written by Babylonians with their own names, indicating their close monitoring of the procedure. A little later, they began to write out the complete tablets themselves. The pillow shape of the reports changed to a more typical tablet shape, and the address to the Sungod was omitted. These later reports are known as “extispicy reports” and are common for the reign of Assurbanipal. We have 216 “oracle enquiries” and 69 “extispicy reports” written by Babylonians and more than 120 “extispicy reports” written by Assyrian experts. Other divination methods, such as terrestrial omens and hemerologies, occur more infrequently on tablets written by Babylonians (see

above, [Table 21.2](#)).

The second largest group of library texts from Nineveh written by Babylonians are the religious texts (36.77 percent). These can be subdivided according to language – Akkadian (360), Sumerian (30), and bilingual Akkadian–Sumerian (184) – or by areas of expertise – cultic songs performed by lamentation priests (*kalûtu*), exorcist’s lore (*āšipûtu*) with rituals and incantations, and diviner’s lore (*bārûtu*) with extispicy rituals and *tāmîtu*-texts (see [Table 21.3](#) and Lambert 2007). The compositions the Assyrian king requested from Babylonian scholars (see above, “Assembling tablets for Assurbanipal’s library in Nineveh”) belonged to all three of the aforementioned professions. Of the Akkadian religious texts, more than 57 percent belong to the exorcist’s lore but none to the lamentations. The latter are well represented among the Sumerian (26.67 percent) and the bilingual (36.41 percent) texts written by Babylonians. Religious texts related to divination (*bārûtu*) are attested only among the Akkadian texts (10.55 percent). This is to be expected, since divinatory texts are known only from the Old Babylonian period onwards, when Sumerian as a spoken language had already died out.

Table 21.3 Religious texts from Nineveh written in Babylonian ductus

<i>Language</i>	<i>Akkadian</i>	<i>Sumerian</i>	<i>bilingual</i>			
<i>Expertise</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>percentage</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>percentage</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>percentage</i>
Lamentations (<i>kalûtu</i>)			8	26.67	67	36.41
Exorcist’s lore (<i>āšipûtu</i>)	208	57.78	3	10.00	91	49.46
Diviner’s lore (<i>bārûtu</i>)	38	10.55				
Varia	114	31.67	19	63.33	26	14.13
Total	360	100	30	100	184	100

The 1068 archival texts and fragments are the second largest group of texts written in Babylonian ductus. The vast majority of them, altogether 993 items, are letters, mostly sent to the Assyrian court in Nineveh by Babylonians cooperating with the crown but living in their native country. But Babylonians were also working in the inner circle of the empire’s administration, as can be shown from a group of sixty-two letters in Babylonian ductus in which the Assyrian king or the crown prince addressed various officials in the south. Found at Nineveh, they were apparently duplicates of the letters actually sent (Fincke 2003/04: 136).

The Tablets of the Library Collection in Nineveh

Written by Assyrian Scholars

Despite the lack of research and recorded data, it is possible to also provide a rough general overview of the tablets from Nineveh written in Assyrian ductus (i.e. by Assyrian scribes). By subtracting the aforementioned 3,505 tablets in Babylonian ductus from the total of 25,051 rejoined tablets and fragments in the Nineveh collection of the British Museum, we are left with 21,546 items in Assyrian script. About 2,500 of them belong to the royal correspondence, which leaves 19,046 scholarly and literary texts, including divination reports. Many of these texts deal in one way or another with divination, 1,745 (9.16 percent) alone with celestial and meteorological omens. Despite this large number, the percentage of celestial omens within the omen corpus in Assyrian script is much smaller than among the tablets written in Babylonian ductus. Altogether, it seems reasonable to assume that 35 percent or more of the Assyrian library texts were concerned with divination. Religious texts in Assyrian ductus seem to make up a similar portion of the total. The remaining texts, including medical treatises, epics and myths, historical texts, and various other compositions, easily comprise more than 20 percent of the library texts. All in all, one can say that the vast majority of the scholarly and literary compositions known from first millennium BCE Mesopotamia are attested with at least one copy among the tablets from the libraries of Nineveh.

Abbreviations

Asb Prism A

Assurbanipal (inscription of) Prism A.

CTN IV

D.J. Wiseman and J.A. Black, *Literary Texts from the Temple of Nabû*, Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud IV, London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 1996.

OIP 2

D.D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*, Oriental Institute Publications II, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1924.

SAA VII

F.M. Fales and J.N. Postgate, *Imperial Administrative Records, Part I: Palace and Temple Administration*, State Archives of Assyria VII, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1992.

SAA VIII

H. Hunger, *Astrological Reports to Assyrian Kings*, State Archives of Assyria VIII, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1992.

SAA X

S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, State Archives of Assyria X, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1993.

SAA XI

F.M. Fales and J.N. Postgate, *Imperial Administrative Records, Part II: Provincial and Military Administration*, State Archives of Assyria XI, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1995.

SAA XV

A. Fuchs and S. Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part III*, State Archives of Assyria XV, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2001.

SAA XVI

M. Luukko and G. van Buylaere, *The Political Correspondence of Esarhaddon*, State Archives of Assyria XVI, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2002.

SAA XVII

M. Dietrich, *The Babylonian Correspondence of Sargon and Sennacherib*, State Archives of Assyria XVII, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2003.

SAA XVIII

F. Reynolds, *The Babylonian Correspondence of Esarhaddon and Letters to Assurbanipal and Sin-šarru-iškun from Northern and Central Babylonia*, State Archives of Assyria XVIII, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2003.

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www.fincke-cuneiform.com/nineveh/index.htm: J.C. Fincke, *Nineveh Tablet Collection*, website created in November 2003.

Further Reading

For the various cuneiform libraries and archives that are known to have existed between 1500 and 300 BCE, see the pioneering survey by Pedersén 1998. A general overview of the tablets from Nineveh and a more detailed description of the tablets written in Babylonian ductus is given by Fincke 2003/04. Frame and George 2005 discuss the history of the Nineveh tablet collection based on a number of newly edited texts. Evidence for the literacy of Assurbanipal and other members of the royal family can be found in Livingstone 2007. For excellent overviews of the find spots of the Nineveh tablets see Reade 1986 and 2000. The archival texts from Nineveh are published in various volumes of the series *State Archives of Assyria* (SAA). For the hundreds of scholarly and literary compositions attested at Nineveh, individual editions should be consulted.

Note

- 1 The authenticity of this and the two other letters (CT 22,1 and BM 45642) that deal with Assurbanipal's tablet collecting in Babylonia is not entirely certain. All of the letters are Late Babylonian copies. Instead of taking them as copies of genuine documents (Fincke 2003/4 and 2005; Frame and George 2005), or at least as based on genuine letters (Frahm 2005: 44), Goldstein 2010 understands them as creations of the Hellenistic age and reflections of the intellectual climate of an era dominated by the great project of creating the Library of Alexandria.

CHAPTER 22

Assyrian Legal Traditions

Frederick Mario Fales

What ties the ship to the wharf is a rope, and the rope consists of fibres,

but it does not get its strength from any fibre which runs

through it from one end to the other, but from the fact that

there is a vast number of fibres overlapping.

(Wittgenstein 1964: 87)

The Many Strands of Assyrian Legal Traditions

Introduction

The debate on what constitutes a particular “legal tradition” is quite heated at present, especially among jurists. It is stimulated, almost on a daily basis, by evidence that certain facets of the all-pervasive globalization process may not agree – and sometimes openly clash – with the norms of the single partners involved. From this recognition, with its manifold solutions (see in general Legrand-Munday [eds.] 2003), stems an equally rich theoretical discussion: which are the historical factors to be singled out as prime movers of a particular system of legal beliefs and practices – ideological/religious tenets, economics with its attendant ethics, or the broader history of *mentalités*? This issue is usually treated by looking at extant legal traditions of long duration, in order to verify their degree of adaptation to political/cultural shifts over time – cf. e.g. the cases of England, China, Islam, Hinduism, etc. – at times, however, risking an exceedingly compartmentalized approach (as noted by Krawietz 2012). Of course, the quest is much more daunting when applied to long dead and buried states of Antiquity – although one of these, the Roman Empire, has bequeathed us a body of jurisprudence from which many “civil

law” systems of today descend.

Here the question of the possible debt that later juridical traditions owe to the ancient Near East need not be taken up – cogent observations on the matter have been brought forth of late (Westbrook 2003a; cf. Magdalene 2013). It is, in fact, risky to apply classifications anchored in the paradigms of Roman jurisprudence to ancient Near Eastern law. Recent approaches to the latter are rather based on the interconnections between philology and semiology or between written sources and archaeology, or are modeled on anthropological-historical categories such as ethnicity and gender, or seek functional grids linking law and economy (cf. Liverani 2008). Just to give an example, a fundamental aspect of Mesopotamian thought in its 3000-year development, which a purely “Romanistic” paradigm has difficulty in framing within its key concepts of *ius* and *fas* (Zaccagnini 2008: 42), regards the divine foundations of justice – as e.g. personified by the god Šamaš – and the permeation of divine jurisdictional principles not only within the fabric of human legal authority and its effects, but also well beyond this intellectual and social domain. As is well known, some later cultures would come to uphold and develop, whereas others would skirt or reject, the deeply embedded Mesopotamian notion that all forms of interaction between humans in peace and war, and even of contact between humanity and the gods – from the vast universe of divination to religious belief and ritual concerning the fate of the individual and of all mankind – rested on an overarching assumption concerning the existence of righteousness in the Heavens (Wilcke 2007; Démare-Lafont 2011); and it may be safely said that one of the backbones of modernity (including its laws) lies in this basic opposition of cultural choices.

Moving closer to home, we may first of all note that the foundations and procedural developments of Assyrian law – especially insofar as they were connected to an ever-increasing importance of the role of the city-god and later national god Assur – are sufficiently complex as to require a detailed historical investigation. Already a general comparative outlook reveals numerous characteristics which set Assyrian legal traditions uniquely apart from that of other political formations of the ancient Near East. Even more significant, however, is the fact that these traditions underwent various inner shifts over time, as visible in the textual but also the archeological record. In the course of some thirteen centuries (ca. 1900–600 BCE), the Assyrian juridical system proves to reflect and incorporate not only political and ideological changes of major import, but also innovations taking place in legal procedure and its institutional foundations. In sum, taking up the famous Wittgenstein analogy quoted above, a bird’s-eye view of the many different “fibers” (or perhaps more aptly, larger “strands”) that constitute the “rope” linking together Assyrian normative beliefs and practices over the chronological division of Old, Middle, and Neo-Assyrian periods – such as

will be attempted by way of common brackets and specific case studies in this essay – is bound to follow rather closely the transformations that Assyrian society and culture experienced in each of these phases (outlined in brief in the following paragraphs).

The Old Assyrian period

The Old Assyrian (OA) period presents the profile of an economically goal-oriented society with a regionalist range of interests; only defensive measures were implemented for the city of Ashur, placed on a high ridge above the Middle Tigris, whereas no dominance was exerted on territories lying outside the immediate range of its rural hinterland (Veenhof and Eidem 2008). Since the earliest population of the city-state was of Akkadian stock, and since Ashur was part of the provincial system of the large state formations of Southern Mesopotamia in the late third millennium, the political-institutional fundamentals which we find in place around 1900 BCE show some analogues with these prior contexts, such as the role of the king as “steward” (*išši’akkum*) of the local deity – a *numen loci* bearing the same name as the city (Lambert 1983) – and as intermediary between the god and the community.

Differently from elsewhere, however, the OA king’s political and legal powers were framed within a comprehensive system of civil government of oligarchic nature, dominated by the great merchant families of Ashur, in which the city assembly (*puḥrum*) and the year-eponym (*līmum*) played a crucial role; thus his status was that of a “first among equals,” whereas absolute rulership of the city-state was reserved for the god Assur (Larsen 2000). In this capacity – albeit through the mediation of the human king and the assembly – the deity could exercise his power to promote equity and social justice in favor of common citizens who had become poor and debt-ridden, in line with many similar Mesopotamian royal measures of this age: a text records the fact that Assur “had mercy on his city,” by allowing indebted real estate owners to redeem their property under extremely favorable conditions (Veenhof 2003: 472–3).

Day-to-day legal practice from this period, as visible almost exclusively from the archives of the commercial entrepôt (*kārum*) of Kaniš in Anatolia between the 19th and 18th centuries (see below, *Old Assyrian Legal Practices*), may thus be considered indigenous to a certain extent, and linked to a shared Northern Mesopotamian legal heritage (later still visible at Nuzi; Zaccagnini 2003: 569–73). Moreover, various of its features (in litigation, social divisions of labor and responsibility, pledge law, etc.) prove to have been carried over to subsequent phases of Assyrian history, despite simplifications in procedure and a set of shifts in terminology. The OA normative lynchpins may be

identified in a series of painstaking step-by-step procedures – involving the presence of specific functional figures – which were carried to their conclusion (a judicial verdict or a contractual stipulation) through formal protocols entailing fixed factual or symbolic acts and their formulaic presentations. Each of these steps, aside from their oral enactment, could also be recorded on tablets, the binding character of which was assured by sworn oaths and the sealings of witnesses and parties.

Other features of OA legal procedure, however, rather reflect the particular tenets of a mercantile society in a foreign context, not only in its self-regulating aims but also, and especially, in its partially bi-cultural (Assyrian/Anatolian) composition. Just to give a few examples in family law: marriage between Assyrians and Anatolians is relatively well documented at Kaniš. Assyrian men were often polygamous, with a “main” wife in Ashur and a concubine, or even a second wife, whether Assyrian or Anatolian, in the entrepôt; but opposite situations are also attested. Purely Anatolian contracts, however, seem to be more rigid by forbidding “another wife” outright. Assyrian society viewed divorce as a purely private affair, while Anatolian divorces were under the supervision of local rulers or their delegates (Veenhof 2003: 452–4). Other differences regard indebtedness: whereas Assyrian contracts established deadlines to repay loans in connection with incoming caravan traffic, Anatolians calculated such limits also in relation to agricultural cycles or seasonal festivals. Further, while – in line with general Mesopotamian custom – commercial debts by Assyrians could not be eliminated through acts of social justice, whether it was at all practiced or not in this period (cf. above), the case was different for Anatolians – usually burdened by higher interest-rates – since local rulers seem to have periodically enforced collective measures of “washing away the debts” of their subjects (ibid.: 466). Finally, an Assyrian sold into slavery to cover a debt could be redeemed by a family member upon payment of the original sale price or multiples thereof; but in Anatolian contracts, also members of a collective social group could act as redeemers, and vindication of redeemed persons by the original parties was sanctioned by heavy fines or even the death penalty (ibid.: 448, 465).

These limited but manifold structural differences to be observed in OA legal practice open up wider questions of their own. The historical model of OA trade in Anatolia has been frequently viewed as involving the dominance of a structured core (Ashur) over an asymmetric and less structured periphery (the many individual Anatolian kingdoms). However, it is nowadays clear that the international commercial horizon at this time was vastly ramified (Larsen 1987: 54–6) and that the merchant traffic promoted by the Assyrians was only one among many similar endeavors taking place in the Tigris–Euphrates river basins (Charpin and Durand 1997). Moreover, it is increasingly evident that

local Anatolian polities played a concurrent role in shaping the mechanisms of the Assyrian trading system from a political and economic standpoint: specifically, the entire mechanism of OA trade was regulated through sworn international treaties, called “oath” (*mamītum*), between the Assyrian authorities and the local Anatolian rulers, which were presumably preceded by various provisional drafts, carried to and fro by envoys (Eidem 2003: 749–50). The few examples of such treaties hitherto discovered show that Assyrians enjoyed rights of residence in their entrepôts (lying within/ alongside the Anatolian cities) and legal extraterritoriality, i.e. as political and juridical extensions of the city-state of Ashur. Forms of commercial protectionism against possible competitors on the Anatolian market (e.g. Babylonian traders) were underwritten by the local rulers, who – on the other hand – were entitled to a levy on goods traversing their territory with Assyrian caravans, whether coming or going.

A further well-known model, based on “acculturation,” implying the partial assimilation of “recipient groups” to “donor societies” – such as has for example been applied to ancient Greek colonies both eastward and westward – seems even less satisfactory in this context. As a case in point, the Anatolians (designated by the foreign traders as *nu’ā’um*, “natives”) appear to have been highly selective in their acceptance of Assyrian material products and ideological positions – even in the domain of law, where they retained local mores, such as the river ordeal, and asserted specific forms of organized social protection. On the other hand, the merchants from Ashur might have fallen prey to local influence, if we may judge by the many items of Anatolian material culture discovered in their tombs and dwellings within the *kārum*, alongside Mesopotamian- and Syrian-style artifacts (Özgüç 2003).

In sum, hierarchically-based templates (basically of a “top-down” character) do not at present seem fully adequate to explain the great socio-cultural complexity of the textual and archaeological evidence from Kaniš and other Anatolian outposts. Of late, it has been suggested to frame OA commerce within a “trade-diaspora” model, well known from Medieval times onward (cf. e.g. the present-day enclaves of Indian merchants in Africa, of Chinese merchants in Southeast Asia, etc.). This model (“bottom-up” in its focus) refers to interregional exchange networks composed of spatially dispersed groups of traders, who show features of distinctiveness and inner cohesion vis-à-vis their host communities, and maintain numerous ties with their homeland, although they may progressively develop separate and unique forms of identity (Stein 2008). Undoubtedly more fluid and realistic than the models described above, the “trade-diaspora” template still remains to be tested in detail against the Kaniš evidence, specifically as regards legal theory and practice.

The Middle Assyrian period

In the texts of the Middle Assyrian (MA) period, after a documentary gap of some 300 years, Assyria emerges as a full-fledged territorial state, progressively asserting itself in a maze of international relations which encompassed all of Western Asia during the Late Bronze Age. Possibly as a reaction to an extended Mittanian overlordship in the 16th and 15th centuries, an innovative political-religious ideology was developed, through which the god Assur bestowed upon the newly-enthroned king not only full divine legitimization of his rule, but also the specific command to enlarge the territory with his “just scepter” in outlying zones, i.e. to enlarge the “land of Ashur” by military means (Postgate 1992). Beginning with the 14th century, newly conquered lands in the strategically-located northern Syrian and Upper Tigris regions were thus annexed to the Assyrian heartland. The capital was now flanked by other major cities, such as Nineveh, seat of the cult of the goddess Ištar and residence of princes (Tenu 2004), and Dur-Katlimmu, where the “grand vizier” had his command center (Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996). In the framework of marked political multi-centrism characterizing international law of the 15th–13th centuries, Assyria began to deal with the great powers of the time (Egypt and Ḫatti) on an equal diplomatic footing.

The king, now ensconced in a dynastic system of succession, came to represent the ultimate seat of all power in peace and war (Jakob 2003: 19–22). A rigidly hierarchical administrative chain of command was at his orders: the rule of each newly constituted province (*pāhutu*) was entrusted to a governor, who directed district commanders, charged with protecting rural areas from marauders and forwarding tax-revenues and other produce toward the capital city, for the benefit of the Palace or as cultic offerings (*ginā’u*) for the temple of Assur; “royal delegate(s)” (*qēpū/ūtu (ša) šarri*) were used to liaise between the capital and the provinces. Other territories were, instead, merely submitted to vassalage, entailing an annual tribute, especially metals and horses, with no religious ties with the cult of the god Assur. The western plains and hilly regions to the northwest of the capital (where the last remnants of Mittanian rule had survived under the name of Ḫanigalbat before their demise), up to the Euphrates (beyond which Hittite political power reached until the early 12th century) were entrusted to a “grand vizier” (*sukkallu rabi’u*), who could have been a member of the royal line (Cancik-Kirschbaum 1999) and was a viceroy of sorts, with possible additional prerogatives as a military prefect – as the further title of “king of Ḫanigalbat” might indicate (Fales 2012a).

The role of the former great merchant families of Ashur now expanded, as they became an elite class bound to the vaster politics of the new state: year-eponyms (*limmu*) were chosen from its midst and landed holdings, granted by the Crown as rewards for fealty, covered increasingly wide portions of the

rural landscape with fortified farmsteads (*dunnu*: cf. Akkermans 2007). The Assyrian elite also had the possibility of receiving “gratuities” (*šulmānu*) in the form of animals, barley, metals, and slaves, in exchange for their legal intervention in difficult cases: these transactions were regulated by contracts (Finkelstein 1952). Similarly to the OA period, MA law shows a division into two basic social classes – free persons (*a’īlu*) and slaves (*ardu*) – while a further split regarded purely and simply “natives” (*um/nzarḥu*) and foreigners, with the latter at times enjoying positions of some importance within the administrative structure of the reign. Groups of deported POWs (*šābu*), especially from the West (Hurrians) or the South (Kassites) are also attested, in texts describing their employment in the countryside or in building activities in cities (Freydank 2005) – thus foreshadowing the regular practice of mass deportation which will mark the social policies of the NA empire.

The legal-ideological ownership of most, if not all, land by the Crown appears related to a system of tenantry in exchange for feudal service (*ilku*), whereby each granted estate was expected to supply the Crown with a contingent of troops, or with corresponding civilian service (Postgate 1982). A feudal tenant could alienate the land or pass it on to his heirs; while failure to provide the *ilku* could entail its re-assignment to another tenant. A class of persons called “villagers” (*ālaiū*) could have represented small landowners owing *ilku*-service to the Crown, or former landowners dispossessed by the newer form of landownership, and thus forced to work on the estates of the elite, with binding obligations which passed on to their heirs, unless redeeming procedures were carried out (Lafont 2003: 532–3).

The form of the private debt-note was a common vehicle for administrative acts involving individuals and the central government. The distribution of commodities effected by the state in exchange for specific deliveries was thus presented as a “debt,” which the delivery thereupon extinguished, at times with the “smashing of the tablet,” no witnesses being required. This system regulated the inner legal and economic mechanisms of the government sector, where a work-assignment system (*iškāru*) foresaw the doling out of raw materials of many different types (wool, leather, sinews, wood, spices, grain, stone, bricks, textiles) through a contractual obligation with the craftsman – whether employed full-time or part-time –, in exchange for the finished products. The provision of raw materials for the *iškāru* was assured by the outlying provinces in a continuous centripetal movement (Postgate 2010).

On the basis of these major institutional and economic aspects, MA legal practice deviates to a certain degree from that of the previous period, although a framework of diversified inner economic and social canons should be taken into account to avoid simplistic summarizations. As will be seen below, the official provisions and regulations surviving from this age appear harsh to the point of calculated frightfulness in the punishment of misdemeanors and

crimes involving gender or social groups, frequently recurring to corporal/capital penalties and to extra-rational means of reaching the truth, such as the oath and the river ordeal – and thus causing scandalized views on the part of some modern interpreters (“a juridical museum of horrors”: Cardascia 1969; cf. also Saporetti 2008). On the other hand, day-to-day legal procedures – based on a textual corpus which has been rapidly expanding through archaeological finds in the last decades – indicate that some crucial rights and legal conditions differed radically from those of the official norms, and that recourse to pecuniary measures was widespread. Some provincial archives also show a certain dependence of jurisprudence on local socio-political conditions, as e.g. at Tell al-Rimah, ancient Qaṭṭara (Postgate 2002).

An overall juridical template for this period might therefore call for a distinction between stricter normative codifications (perhaps in some cases even of long-standing tradition) prescribed within, and for, the specific moral and intellectual “climate” of the capital city Ashur – as a uniquely eminent seat of government and worship at the same time – and a set of more functionally-oriented tenets regulating the mechanisms of economy and society throughout the kingdom, with its many provinces, diverse geographical landscapes, and mutually intermingling peoples (see already Postgate 1982: 308). Only additional evidence will allow to decide in the future whether, and to what extent, this twofold distinction is worth upholding, *per se* and comparatively – e.g. in the light of some singular analogues linking official MA laws/edicts and normative prescriptions in the Old Testament (Paul 2005: 159–76). In any case – especially as regards the entire sphere of kingship and its attributes, Palace society and its privileges, and various facets of landed property – the legal tenets of the MA multi-regional state may be considered the crucial stepping-stone between the city-based jurisprudence of the OA period and the “universal” application of law which would come to mark the following imperial age.

The Neo-Assyrian period

After some 200 years of political crisis due to the Aramean takeover of the western sector of the reign, and a long preparatory phase of step-by-step reconquest and expansion (late tenth to mid-eighth centuries), the Neo-Assyrian (NA) state developed into the first world empire in the course of one century (approx. 745–612), stretching from southern Anatolia to the Persian Gulf, and from western Iran to the border of Egypt – and even briefly to the Nile Valley (Fales 2001; Radner 2003). At its apex, the empire combined a double system of territorial and political domination: a core of adjacent provinces subjected in full to Assyrian jurisdiction was flanked by vassal and allied polities bound by written treaties to fealty and commercial support in

exchange for partial autonomy. Provincial seats of power, modeled after the capital cities of inner Assyria, were interconnected through a vast road network, on which a traffic of civilian administrators, of envoys bearing written and oral messages, of armed forces on the march to and from increasingly remote battlefields, of vanquished communities deported hither and thither, and of abundant goods in the form of booty, tribute, and taxes, meant to enrich the Palaces and supply the Assur temple, incessantly flowed on foot, horseback, or on mule-drawn carts.

Only the Babylonian region managed to escape this status, and to retain by and large its native administrative structure, as the result of a centuries-long policy of military revolts and unremitting political/cultural resistance (Brinkman 1979; Frame 1992); Assyrian rulers were forced to consider Babylonian kingship as a separate institution within Mesopotamian tradition, to be eventually assumed by themselves with extreme tact (including new throne-names). Not by chance, therefore, Babylonia held on to its distinctive tenets in the realm of jurisprudence concerning language, document typology, dating techniques, and specific ideological-religious references – thus constituting a fully autonomous legal tradition, different from that of its would-be dominators.

Elsewhere, however, the “Assyrian way of life” over the subjected people was asserted through the imposition of many homogenous administrative features: from the year datings by eponym and the monthly calendar to weights and measures to the Neo-Assyrian language used for official purposes. On the other hand, other parlances and written expressions were tolerated and at times even officially accepted, as in the case of Aramaic, which was used far and wide; and no imposition of Assyrian cult practices on local ones may be demonstrated, despite the constantly reaffirmed supremacy of the god Assur (see below, *Neo-Assyrian Legal Practices*). As for material culture, specific typologies of pottery (Anastasio 2010) and a fixed range of formats and formularies for legal documents on clay tablets were diffused throughout the empire, showing variances with the ones in prior use (Postgate 1997). Despite the continuing use from MA times onwards of rewritable surfaces (wax-covered wooden or ivory tablets, usually hinged together as “dyptichs” or “polyptichs”) and a newer, and presumably vast, diffusion of pliable media (parchment scrolls, papyrus sheets) in various compartments of NA imperial administration – possibly under the influence of the many “minority” cultures that Assyria hosted in its midst – it appears that the clay tablet retained its traditional function as main vehicle for juridical purposes.

The NA legal system reflects, but also expands to an unprecedented degree, the basic institutional cornerstones carried down from the MA age such as the divine choice of the Assyrian king for the concrete exercise of authority in peace and war, through a combination of royal ideology, religious doctrines,

and visual and textual propaganda (Holloway 2002). The exercise of justice was part and parcel of the duties of the omniscient, omnipotent, and ever-righteous Assyrian ruler, although he could, in his turn, be answerable to the gods in case of malfeasance, even with serious repercussions on his kingdom. A political-literary text of the time makes this clear: “if the king does not heed justice, his people will be thrown into chaos and his land will be devastated” (Lambert 1960: 112). With these tenets, the NA period presents a major shift in international relations and in the legal instruments used for their regulation (Parpola 2003; Fales 2008). With the constitution of the NA empire, the Near East became a mono-centric political and ideological entity, bordered by an immense periphery of “otherness,” which official ideology presented as inferior in all aspects – from merely barbaric to explicitly sinful – and thus deserving of being drawn by force within the “civilizing” horizon of the Assyrian state.

In practice, the king’s rule was supported in the capital and throughout the empire by an elite class, formed by native Assyrians and an Assyrianized nobility from the subordinate states (Parpola 2003). The totality of male officials was at times subdivided between “bearded men” (*ša ziqni*) and eunuchs (*ša rēši*; Deller 1997); while the status of the latter, already attested in the MA period (see below, *Middle Assyrian Legal Practices*), is still not totally clear in its implications, both types of courtiers are attested at all levels of society, as also visible in the pictorial record (palace bas-reliefs on stone; ivory statuettes or carvings). In general, the high-ranking officials of the NA state (whether at the provincial, municipal, or temple level) were appointed by the king – at times after recourse to divinatory practices. Lower-level ranks were filled in by members of the palace bureaucracy, but approval by the king was occasionally requested. A series of seven officials, the “Grandeess” (*rabūte*), whose titles reflect older palatial staff professions, were closest to the king, perhaps even forming a specific “cabinet”; some of them were at the same time in charge of provinces or of specific army units, formed by recruits or by professionals (Parpola 1995; Mattila 2000).

Written and pictorial evidence alike testifies to the multiplicity of women of various ranks and functions within the royal palaces; however, interestingly enough, polygamy was not a frequent practice in NA society, differently from the OA and MA periods (Radner 2003: 895). Beside the chosen or preferred wife of the king, who bore the title *sēgallu*, literally “woman of the palace,” secondary queens could be present, as demonstrated by the inscriptions accompanying the richly furnished ninth- and eighth-century queens’ tombs at Kalḫu (Oates and Oates 2001: 80–8). The royal court also lodged noble ladies of Assyrian and foreign origin as honored guests or hostages, and entire harems of defeated foreign rulers (Parpola 2012). Life in the royal harem (*bēt isāte*) was under the official jurisdiction of the Queen, as already known from the MA harem edicts; she was aided by a “harem manageress” (*šakintu*), who

could rise in rank from that of a mere *sekretu*, “harem woman,” and had female and eunuch servants, plus a female deputy, at her command. A text from Nineveh listing thirteen *šakintus* with their workplaces indicates that royal harems were present not only in different palaces of the capital, but also in various provincial cities, and a recently discovered archive of a *šakintu* in the city of Tušḫan (Parpola 2008) confirms the veracity of the list.

The authority in the individual provinces was entrusted to governors (*bēl pāhete*) and their subordinates, who were responsible for collecting taxes and other dues from their territories, as well as for supplying conscripts from the army and laborers for public works, with their apparel and animals. Within the provinces, the status of landed property could differ widely. Some prebendary lands (*ma’uttu*) accompanied governorships or other high-ranking functions – their proceeds going in a fixed share to the state, the remainder to the officeholder. Originally prebendary assignments could have given rise to veritable “households” – *bētu* – of the royal family, which in the seventh century comprised real estate, palatial residences, and civilian and military personnel. Newly conquered or barren land belonged to the state, which could shift around communities of deportees or of craftsmen to occupy it, whereas in the older areas of Assyrian conquest (between or around the Twin Rivers) private ownership was widespread, showing historical “waves” of new assignments by the Crown or the governors – through grants or other measures – and their subsequent re-absorption through buyouts of impoverished landowners by high-ranking military and bureaucrats. Thus, in the Jezirah, official texts from the ninth century indicate a thrust toward new colonization of steppelands through the creation of many hamlets, whereas letters and deeds of the seventh century from the same general area reveal a landscape of vast rural estates, formed by multiple landed holdings scattered here and there in a “leopard’s-skin” pattern, and often manned by groups of *glebae adscripti* drawn from deportations or debt-enslavement. Statistical studies further suggest that these families of rural “serfs” could have been artificially subdivided, with some females being destined to household slavery (Fales 2009–10).

Cities and their hinterlands were entrusted to the mayor (*ḥazannu*) and the city overseer (*ša muḫḫi āli*), perhaps chosen from the elders of the community. While cities do not seem to have owned land, they tended to underscore their jurisdiction over landed property in their environs, as may be seen from the seals of city officials on some sale documents (Klengel-Brandt and Radner 1997). Temples could own land, usually at close range, in order to provide offerings for the gods (Radner 2003: 898–9).

Such a ramified bureaucratic apparatus, which was consistently flanked by military contingents (especially of non-Assyrian auxiliaries, such as the Itueans and Gurreans of nomadic origin, who operated as military police or

the like), had the basic function of maintaining law and order in the increasingly vast territories under Assyrian control/domination. On the other hand, the NA letters relate of many a difficulty in law enforcement throughout the provinces, caused by insurrections of local communities or by individual acts of outright misdemeanor, from smuggling to larceny of commodities and taxes to collective flight from servile conditions in the countryside. Even greater problems of security could arise from unwarranted penetrations of foreign groups – such as marauding Arabs during the reign of Sargon II (722–705) – within the confines of the land, which was guarded by a strategically located but altogether fragile mesh of fortified outposts (Parker 2001; Fales 2002). Finally, there are abundant hints from letters that corruption was widespread both in urban and rural settings, with accounts of “gratuities” and bribes received, of prevarications, and personal defamations occurring at many levels of the civilian bureaucracy, or between Assyrians and foreigners. As a remedy to all this, a policy of universal “vigilance” (*maššartu*) was imposed on all the king’s subjects regarding any untoward act or behavior, to be reported posthaste to superiors and/or to the king himself – with the ensuing creation of a climate of widespread suspicion and denunciation, both at the royal court and in the provinces, especially during the reign of Esarhaddon (Fales 2011).

The end, when it came, was a true catastrophe (Liverani 2008), and the territorially over-extended Assyrian empire, in which moreover areas of indirect dominion had grown exponentially, suffered a swift political collapse. But recent discoveries at Dur-Katlimmu have shown that – counter to the traditional belief that the Assyrian heartland was punitively left in utter abandonment and socio-economic destitution by the new Chaldean rulership – not only life went on in the old provinces, but even local business activity continued, with the aid of scribes trained in the Assyrian/Aramaic script and legal formulary, whose sole new imposition was to adopt the Babylonian dating system (Kühne et al. 1993).

Old Assyrian Legal Practices

Context and sources

Information on OA administration and legislation is still quite scarce from the city-state of Ashur itself, since the older archeological layers were left almost untapped during the main excavations on the site by Walter Andrae (1903–13). Legal materials in the language and script of the OA period thus stem primarily from the commercial entrepôt (*kārum*) of the city of Kaniš (present-

day Kültepe near Kayseri), some 1000 kilometers northwest of Ashur, which constituted the administrative hub of a network of Assyrian trading establishments (including smaller ones called *wabartum*) spread across southern, and even central, Anatolia (cf. Veenhof and Eidem 2008: 153–79; Barjamovic 2011). Excavations at Kaniš have yielded some 20,000 texts dating to ca. 1950–1840 (*kārum* level II), and ca. 250 more of a slightly later date (early 18th century; level Ib), also comprising some texts from other Anatolian commercial outposts – most notably Hattuša, later to become the Hittite capital. The uneven distribution of sources has led modern scholars to various attempts at interpretation, all of which have to remain preliminary in view of a large number of still unpublished texts (Veenhof and Eidem 2008: 68–75).

In sum, the OA period has brought down to us a very rich, but at the same time unbalanced, documentation. The legal dealings of the Assyrian community at Kaniš are attested in private archives of tablets often written by four or five generations of traders, stored in homogeneous lots in baskets, boxes, or jars within locked rooms, and comprising both business correspondence (Michel 2008) and legal deeds (Ulshöfer 1995). These documents essentially bear on matters of Assyrian commercial activity abroad (see the case study below), and shed only indirect light on the legal institutions of the capital Ashur, whence the year-round commercial traffic by donkey-driven caravans originated. In addition, a few hundred documents which concern the commercial and private dealings of the indigenous population of Kaniš – in the main of Hittite stock, as indicated by personal names (Michel 2001: 40) – are testimonials for a decidedly non-Assyrian legal tradition.

Organs of legislation

The city of Ashur (dubbed *ālum*, i.e. “the City” par excellence) had its legal organs in the assembly of its citizens (*puḫrum*), in the king (*rubā’um*, “prince,” at times also *bēlum*, “lord”), who was the chief magistrate, as head and executive officer of the assembly itself, and in the yearly appointed eponym (*līmum*), who was possibly drawn from the members of the main kinship groups of the city (Larsen 1976, 2000; list in Veenhof 2003b). These three institutional bodies had totally different destinies after the OA period: the first one disappears from the written record, the second one underwent a radical shift in its functions and in its relation to the god Assur, while the third – but overall most elusive – one survived intact until the very end of Assyrian history.

The Ashur assembly was not only the highest judicial authority both for the city-state and for its foreign dependencies – in the form of a court of law – but

it was also responsible for operational decisions and for rules of general policy affecting the trade circuit, either as a comprehensive body or through specifically appointed committees. The legal impact of the assembly may be deduced from verdicts in the name of “the City” (or at times of “the City and the lord”) regarding matters as diverse as payments of debts, compensation for losses during caravan trips, and provisions upon the death of traders. These verdicts became official rulings, in the form of sealed letters (*awāt ālim*) sent to the *kārum* through messengers (“envoys of the City”).

No law code from this period has been retrieved, but random quotes and references in letters and verdicts mentioning “the words written on the stela” allow us to surmise that forms of statutory law existed and were even of binding value, in contrast to the situation in Babylonia; however, it is still unclear whether, and to what extent, such “words” reflected the powers of the assembly and/or of the king. Quite uncertain, moreover, is the assembly’s size, the social status of its members (who presumably came from the main merchant families of the city), and its inner subdivision by age/power groups – although the “Elders,” a body particularly well attested in Babylonia (Démare-Lafont 2011: 340–1), certainly formed part of it – as is the process of decision-making in its midst. The meetings of the assembly seem to have taken place in the general area of the Assur temple; this location is not totally surprising, since the religious and administrative personnel of the sanctuary was actively involved in commercial matters, not only as recipients of precious votive gifts, but also as lenders of substantial sums to the merchants’ establishments, with the ensuing profits.

On the other hand, the practical aspects of trade, in which Ashur acted as a crucial hub of import and export, were centered on a specific building, the “City Hall” (*bīt ālim*). Here the eponym had his office and exercised his political and social power – possibly in some counterbalance to the prerogatives of the king – by collecting and redistributing assets in silver (taxes, fees, debts, etc.) owed by the traders to the caravan-owners or to the City (Dercksen 2004: 76–95). Not by chance, the most ancient and most hallowed legal instrument/symbol of the city-state, the cylinder seal of the god Assur himself – which we know to have been preserved with reverence down to the seventh century – was kept in this building, of major administrative importance at least until MA times (Larsen 1976: 156, 193; George 1986: 141; see also the Neo-Assyrian case study below).

There is also evidence for an assembly of the merchants based in the *kārum* of Kaniš itself, which could issue circular notices to the minor commercial outposts in Anatolia, and receive legal appeals from them. Rules for the convening and decision-making of the Kaniš assembly – obviously placed at a subordinate level to the *puḫrum* of Ashur – are preserved in three very fragmentary tablets, known as “statutes” of the entrepôt (Larsen 1976: 282–338); they deal with the settling of accounts and with the passing of verdicts.

From these and other texts we also learn that the *kārum* assembly had a secretary, its own archives, and legal and administrative headquarters in a specific building called “sacred precinct” near the “gate of the god” (Assur), where oaths were taken by swearing on the “dagger of the god” – a symbolically binding object presumably deposited within the local temple, also known from Babylonian juridical contexts (Holloway 2002: 167–9).

Case study: Litigation in a mercantile society

Many of the legal practices directing the Assyrian merchants in their business dealings among themselves, or with individuals/authorities back home at Ashur, or finally with the Anatolians, may be made out in some detail from the written evidence from Kaniš. The private legal documents mainly concern actions tied to commercial credit or loans, and the ensuing complications; collective stipulations regarding the various phases and aspects of Assyrian-Anatolian commerce are also attested. However, the traders’ archives also included contracts of a non-commercial nature, on the purchase of houses and slaves in the Kaniš area or pertaining to family law. As for the thousands of business letters, they represent an equally relevant source of information on OA jurisprudence, since they offer crucial data not only on commercial law (i.e. on the commodities involved and on the procedures and legal devices employed) but also on questions of jurisdiction in lawsuits, by quoting statements, appeals, verdicts, and the rulings provided by the “tablets of the City” (Veenhof 2003: 433–4). The case study presented here for OA law thus regards litigation, arbitration, and their commercial implications, which were particularly significant to the merchants involved in view of the constraints of time and money on business (Démare-Lafont 2011: 344).

The procedure for litigation (Veenhof 2003: 441–7) could be conducted by the merchants themselves or by the *kārum* as a collective plaintiff; the court of law could be the entrepôt assembly or, depending on the case, the main *puḫrum* in Ashur. The first stage was that the plaintiff would sue, or “seize the hem” of the defendant’s garment, which was the symbolic act that bound the latter to go through judgment. This was followed by similar “seizures” of a judge and of witnesses – all such actions being recorded under oaths sworn by the god Assur (see Ponchia 2009: 240–1, with previous literature). An “attorney” (*rābišum*) could be hired by the plaintiff to “win his case,” and might even be sent off from Ashur to Anatolia with the “tablet of the City” to direct the dispute on behalf of the latter, with travel expenses and food being added to his professional wages. Examination of evidence was of paramount importance: not only was prior written documentation (if still legally valid) collected and read, but witnesses were also summoned and heard in

testimony. Litigation verdicts by the court could be provisional or conclusive; they tended toward an agreement between the parties, or toward monetary sanctions for the defendant. An exceptional ruling against illicit trading in gold hints at the death penalty, but there were opportunities to appeal to a higher court.

Litigation cases/verdicts, or even straightforward contracts, help to shed an indirect, but highly informative, light on the complex mechanisms of Assyrian commercial procedures (Veenhof 2003a: 473–6). The merchant firms based at Ashur hired carriers who were entrusted with the transport of merchandise and monetary assets by caravan to and from Anatolia, and could even be retained on a long-term basis, thus becoming employees of the firms themselves. As “pay,” but also as obligation for his service, the carrier received an interest-free silver loan (*bē’ūlātum*) with which he could buy textiles to sell in Anatolia for his own profit; interest was applied to the loan only in case of breach of contract. Caravan personnel was entrusted with the merchandise to be shipped abroad by means of specific contracts transacted before witnesses, obviously of primary importance in case of judicial outcomes. On their part, the merchants themselves required secure places to deposit documents, silver, and even merchandise when they were away or traveling: the safekeeping of such valuables in friends’ or colleagues’ houses (at times under seal) could be recorded through contracts with witnesses. Forms of contractual partnership between trade entrepreneurs could be long- or short-term, and could imply a full pooling of capital and labor, with the ensuing rules on sharing gains and losses: mutual representation, access to all debt-notes and depositions for the purpose of facing each other’s outstanding debts, reciprocal investments both in Assyria and Anatolia, and the formal clearance of accounts to obtain individual shares of the profits, were all accounted for. A vaster commercial venture, entailing several members, was called *ellutum* (“company” or “caravan”): costs and losses were shared proportionally, with a minimal guaranteed share of the profits technically designated as “one third.”

The most substantial and durable form of trade partnership – in fact, of investment association – centered around the commercial capital, called *naruqqum* (lit. “the money-bag”), with which a trader (*tamkārum*) was supplied by a set of individuals (Larsen 1999). Shares of the *naruqqum* were bought in gold (2 lbs. or multiples thereof) according to an artificial rate of exchange (4 lbs. silver = 1 lb. gold) and entrusted to the merchant for some nine to twelve years for the pure and simple aim of “conducting trade”; the *tamkārum* himself was one of the investors. Private records often list the amount given over by individual investors to the *naruqqum*-venture; but in any case a main register of the entire association of investors with their single shares, also including deadlines, existed. Profits for the trader were usually one-third of the entire enterprise, whereas individual investors were

guaranteed their minimal “one third.” Premature withdrawal of the invested sums was possible, but with no ensuing profit; steadfast investors were bound to receive their sums back at an 8:1 rate in addition to profits. Shares in long-term *naruqqus* (important families/traders had more than one venture going at the same time) could be resold or inherited.

Finally, penal offences occurring in the exercise of OA trade may be exemplified by a series of court cases implying the two communities of Assyrians and Anatolians. Appeals to the local rulers could be made in case of homicide of Assyrian merchants in their territories, with requests for punishment and/or monetary compensation (“blood money”); but the opposite could apply if the victim was an Anatolian, with blood money to be paid by the *kārum*. Assault or robbery against the traders by Anatolians was to be compensated by local rulers, with obligatory extradition of the culprits for execution on the part of the *kārum* authorities. On a less severe scale, if Assyrians were caught smuggling, trading in restricted goods, and cooperating with enemies of the local rulers, long-term imprisonment faced them; and only “presents” or outright ransom offered by the culprits’ friends or by the *kārum* might ensure their freedom.

Middle Assyrian Legal Practices

Context and sources

No actual MA law-code has come down to us. However, a unique collection of legal provisions is represented by the so-called “Middle Assyrian laws” (MAL). Discovered in various findspots at Ashur, this group of fourteen partly fragmentary tablets (numbered A–O) is in the main formed by 11th-century copies of originals going back some 300 years (very few later duplicates are known). Vaster original codifications have been surmised to be behind the MAL; however, their prior format and even their unitary origin in time are highly uncertain. The contents (Roth 1997: 153–94) present groupings by broad subject-matters: thus tablet A (the largest, with fifty-nine provisions) deals in general with women, and specifically treats theft, blasphemy, bodily harm and assault, sexual offenses, homicide, false accusations, inheritance, marriage and property, veiling, witchcraft, pledges and debts, and abortion. MAL B, with twenty provisions, deals with inheritance, as well as agriculture and irrigation; MAL C + G, with eleven provisions, regards pledges and deposits; the remaining tablets are less complete and significant. The provisions of the MAL have a casuistic (“if ... then”) form, similarly to many Babylonian law-codes, with each “law” being

set apart by horizontal rulings.

A second source of MA law is represented by the so-called “Harem Edicts” (HE), a collection of twenty-three provisions on nine fragmentary tablets; assembled during the time of Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076), this collection lists the decrees (*riksu*) of nine kings over three centuries, concerning the internal activities of the Palace and the harem (Roth 1997: 195–209). A bird’s-eye view of some of the main professions within the Palace (priests, medical specialists, heralds, major-domos, bakers, gate guards) may be gained from these texts; the attestation of eunuchs guarding the women of the harem represents a forerunner to the use of eunuchs at all levels of society in the NA period. The Queen (Parpola 2012) presided over the activities of the other women of the royal harem, who were not totally cloistered and could even travel, albeit under strict supervision; they could also mingle with the court under the responsibility of the palace manager (*rab ekalli*). Breach of the harem rules could entail severe punishments, even the death penalty.

The remaining sources on MA law are legal documents and administrative or epistolary texts from private/public archives from excavated sites, either in the Tigris catchment area (Ashur itself, Šibaniba, Qaṭṭara, Atmanu) or in the Jezirah, such as Ḥarbe, Dur-Katlimmu, and Tell Sabi Abyad and Tell Fekheriyeh (ancient names unknown/uncertain). These texts concern in part the royal administration, and in part the dealings of the leading families of the MA state in their rural holdings. The tablets of legal documents usually bore a cylinder seal impression of the party ceding a right (e.g. selling land) or acknowledging liability placed at the top of the obverse, and seal impressions of some or all of the witnesses rolled out in the spaces left over by the texts.

Organs of legislation

The king himself, as source of all political, executive, and judiciary power on the basis of divine ordainment, was the supreme judge of the land and could intervene in court cases affecting the Assyrian state and involving governors and urban communities. According to the MAL, he could even be called to hear cases involving common crimes, especially if jeopardy for the public interests was foreseen (witchcraft, thefts, forgeries), and rule accordingly. Legal appeals to the king do not seem to have followed the decisions of a lower court, as was the case in OA times, but rather came directly from (one of) the litigating parties – thus prefiguring the custom of “invoking the king’s judgment” which was to become fairly widespread in the NA period.

In the majority of known cases, however, lawsuits – both civil and criminal – were tried before one or more judges (*dayyānum*) who could be members of the palace bureaucracy or of the social elite. No curricula of specific training for this office, and no court buildings for the judgments are evidenced by the

texts; summonses for trials with fixed formularies could be sent out by the judges in the form of letters, although other proceedings were initiated by claims of one of the parties, by third parties, or by “informers” alerting the authorities. The judge initiated trials with an interrogation of the parties, with each version of the events being heard; if no settlement was possible, the defendant was summoned with his witnesses, while the plaintiff was bound to bring evidence for his claims (Lafont 2003: 526–30). If rational proof was lacking, oath and ordeal were required; in practice, if the accused could not prove his/her innocence through the testimony of witnesses, the decision was remanded to the gods. The MAL prescribe oaths sworn before the gods in case of theft, with a wife as defendant, and in witchcraft (thus tallying with the Laws of Hammurabi). Recourse to the river ordeal was made in the absence of witnesses and to establish someone’s good faith; it was prescribed by the judge, with all parties present. However, further details on this procedure – such as may be pieced together from the Mari letters, and from Middle Babylonian and Nuzi texts (Westbrook 2003b: 376; Slanski 2003: 494; Zaccagnini 2003: 575–6) – are neither given in the MA nor in the later NA documentation (Radner 2003: 891). At the end, the judges were obliged to impose statutory penalties or those demanded by the plaintiff, at least according to the MAL (Lafont 2003: 529).

Similarly to the case of Nuzi (Zaccagnini 2003: 570), the limits of the judges’ autonomy vis-à-vis the ruler are not made clear by the texts. Despite the increasing importance of the temple of Assur in the overall structure of the MA state, there is scarce evidence for priestly functions in legal matters; an oracular procedure is prescribed in MAL A §1, and oath and ordeal were overseen by priests, but secular judges had the ultimate responsibility for procedures and verdicts.

Case study: Family law and its implications

Family law shows noticeable differences between the MAL and the few relevant legal documents of the time (Lafont 2003: 533–41). While in the “official” laws the woman is presented as being fully under the authority of a husband or father, various deeds show that women had the capacity to be parties to contracts in the name of their absent spouses, to grant or request loans, to make *šulmānu*-agreements, to adopt, and to purchase. As a case in point, the MAL specify that a wife could not dispose freely of her property; at most, she had a usufruct during her lifetime. Contemporaneous deeds, on the other hand, show that she could, for example, lend silver under a pledge agreement whereby she acquired ownership of the pledge on default (Lafont 2003: 542). This status of MA women thus seems closer to the one visible in OA law, where men and women had equal status in marriage law and divorce,

in business practice, including the right to sue, and in testamentary and inheritance law (Veenhof 2003: 448–60).

Alongside the main wife (designated *aššatu* as in all Assyrian law), who had the right/obligation to wear a veil, concubines (*esirtu*) could also be married through a solemn declaration by the groom and the donning of the veil (MAL A §41). Slave women were to be at all times unveiled; and unlawful veiling entailed dire corporal punishments (MAL A, §40). A *mārat a'īle*, “daughter of a free man” is also attested, but her social status is uncertain (Lafont 2003: 533–4); perhaps the term referred to all non-married women in the household, who went bare-headed, from spinsters to widows to unmarried priestesses (*qadiltu*). The status of the equally unveiled *ḥarimtu*, as a prostitute or not, is still open to discussion (Assante 2007), but she was in any case protected by the law (cf. MAL A, §52, prescribing *lex talionis* – death through beating – for a man who has procured abortion of a *ḥarimtu* by striking her).

Marriage was negotiated between the families: while the role, and the consent, of the bride's father is pre-eminent in the MAL, two deeds describe the possibility for a parentless man and woman to conclude marriage on their own. Betrothal was sanctioned by marital gifts, which comprised *terḥatu* (the so-called “bridal payment,” absent in OA law: Veenhof 2003: 452), i.e. a fixed share in non-consumables, such as metals, owed to the father of the bride; *biblu* (the part in consumables, such as barley or sheep); and a discretionary gift for the husband, meant to be acquired by the widow upon the husband's death (*nudunnû*, which in later NA times will also mean “dowry”: Radner 2003, 900). Accompanying rites and a betrothal meal are specified in the MAL (A, §§42–3). Cohabitation was not mandatory: the bride could still reside in her father's house, if so agreed. Unilateral divorce by the husband, with no compensation for the wife, is indicated by the MAL; another law of the collection states that *terḥatu* was kept by the wife if she was divorced without fault, but went back to the husband's family if she predeceased him with no offspring, whereas additional gifts of jewelry were given back to the man or his heirs (but went to the widow if he died). On the other hand, marriage contracts from this age prescribe equal rights to divorce, as shown by the formula “he/she is no more my husband/wife,” with ensuing payments to the divorced spouse.

Wifehood was by and large geared toward the bearing of offspring, but at the same time the MAL attempted to avert the danger of leaving women homeless and destitute, thus showing similarities to other ancient Near Eastern law collections. Specifically, in case of absence of the husband for commercial endeavors or warfare, the wife was to wait for him for a specific period, after which – were she devoid of means of subsistence – she could remarry. Similar choices applied to widowhood, although the markings of a fully patriarchal society were present in the levirate institution, which allowed all male in-laws to marry the widow, even in succession; however, in case there was no one to

maintain her, the widow (*almattu*) could leave her marital and parental home and freely remarry. Bigamy (already known in the OA period, cf. §1b) was acceptable, either as a voluntary measure or as a consequence of levirate; but a division in status and treatment of the two women is marked in the MAL by terms for “main” (*pānītu*) and “secondary” (*urkittu*) wife. The children of marriage by levirate were considered as the deceased’s offspring.

Children born of adulterous unions in the husband’s absence were assigned to him upon his return. It was the duty of children of all marriages of the deceased father to support the widowed mother or stepmother. Adoption – as a strategy mainly intended to supply the adopter with descendants/heirs and to ensure his support in old age – was widespread; thus even foundlings could be raised as adoptees. If the adoptee was still under the authority of his father, the latter had to forfeit his rights with a contract in favor of the adopter; a contract of adoption was also prescribed to the posthumous son of a remarried widow in favor of the new stepfather. Adoptees of independent status could, instead, give themselves over into adoption – with a contract underscoring the voluntary nature of the move. A further particular case regards an adopted girl, whom the adopter promises to treat “like his own daughter, an Assyrian woman” – i.e. to guarantee her status as a free person, to the extent that the evidence of a similar formula from Nuzi (Zaccagnini 2003: 578) may be invoked. Whether natural or adopted, legitimate sons inherited from their father and received the dowry and other gifts from their deceased mother (MAL B, §1; MAL A, §29) – but also had to pay their parents’ liabilities.

In intestate succession, the sons had the foremost rank, followed by the brothers of the deceased – indivision being a frequent state of affairs. Heirs could resort to arbitration to determine the content of each share, even if a formal division had not been carried out. Upon commonly agreed division, the eldest brother was entitled to a double share (MAL B, §1.3). The formal redaction of MA testaments followed different models, but the accent was consistently placed on the benefits that one or more of the heirs received, and not so much on the precise and full division of property: thus, these testaments essentially resemble deeds of specific gifts *inter vivos*, with the remainder of the property being split up in equal parts (Lafont 2003: 542). Some of these family laws were passed down to the NA period; however, in contrast to MA legislation, in NA times each son, regardless of his age, received an equally large share of the inheritance (Radner 2003: 900).

Neo-Assyrian Legal Practices

Context and sources

Information on NA law derives from a variety of different sources. Royal grants and decrees from the ninth century to the very end of the empire record allocations of land or tax-exemptions for individuals or temples, other benefits for the sanctuaries, and appointments of officials; most of them bear the royal seal. Some of them present the wording “copied verbatim from an original deed (*dannatu*) with the seal of the gods Assur and Ninurta”: this formula implies reference to a prior deed, of which the gods themselves would have been parties and guarantors. However, since the gods’ seals are not reproduced (differently from at least one treaty-document, see the case study below), the expression could have represented an ideological stratagem to legitimize the king’s action.

The approximately 3500 letters from this period offer (albeit at random) numerous insights into the legal procedures of this age, including the mechanisms of foreign policy and the function of covenantal documents (*adê*; see case study). As for material culture, cylinder or stamp seals and/or their impressions on tablets provide information on day-to-day administrative and legal procedures; especially the multiplicity of royal seals distributed to high-level officials points to an innovative practice of delegation of royal power far and wide (Radner 2008).

NA legal documents – broadly split between documents of sale and of credit of many different types – have come down to us from excavations carried out in northern Iraq and adjacent regions from the mid-19th century onwards; these archaeological findings show that storage of legal tablets in secure environments (e.g. in sealed jars within private houses) was a common custom – in contrast to other types of contemporaneous documents, which were often discarded (e.g. letters). As of now, some twenty-five sites have yielded almost 2000 texts of juridical content, as part and parcel of private or public administrative tablet archives (Radner 1997: 4–18; 2011: 395, map). The main bodies of documents come, befittingly, from cities which had the successive function of imperial capital: the earliest political and religious center of Ashur, then Kalḫu (875[?]-706/5), and finally Nineveh (704–612). A temple archive is the origin of the legal documents found in Imgur-Ellil. West of the Tigris, sites bearing archives of provincial officials lie on the tributaries of the Upper Euphrates, the Khabur (Dur-Katlimmu), and the Balīḫ (Guzana), while fully private “business” archives come from Ma’allanate (an unidentified site between the two), and from the Euphrates riverbank (Burmarina, Til-Barsip). Legal documents are a spin-off of a multi-disciplinary library at Ḫuzirina on the Balīḫ. Beyond the Euphrates, random legal documents come from excavated sites in Southern Turkey and present-day Israel, whereas no such materials have been hitherto found in the eastern sector of the empire.

The NA deeds on clay tablets had relatively standard formats – of rectangular shape, written on the short or on the long side, or of rougher triangular shape, possibly doubling as a text and a sealing; the associated terms attempt at some precision (*dannatu* = “binding (sales) document,” *egirtu* = “(horizontally written) loan document”), but local traditions and Assyrian-Aramaic linguistic symbiosis could have muddled the issue (Fales and Radner et al. 2005: 611–12). Only the “selling” or “owing” parties – and not the witnesses, as in the MA period – sealed the deeds, and the seals were rolled or impressed on the clay before, and not after, the writing of the text, thus leaving a clearer imprint (Postgate 1986). The role of the scribes was all-important; personal scribes are attested for officials of every rank. A special function seems to have been reserved for the *šābit ṭuppi*, perhaps indicating the actual scribe “who drew up the tablet” as in the MA period (Postgate 2012). Every deed bore the date at which the described legal transaction took place and/or was registered in writing (by day, month, and year). Thus, NA legal documents are of particular interest for the reconstruction of the chronological backbone of this period, especially regarding the years between 648 and the fall of the empire (612 to 609), for which no canonical register of year-eponyms (*limmu*) has come down to us (Millard 1994).

An increasing number of excavated NA sites testifies to the practice of writing deeds on clay tablets both in Assyrian cuneiform and in Aramaic alphabetic script (with incised or painted characters); doubtless, deeds in Aramaic on other, “soft,” media – irretrievably lost to us – were particularly abundant in areas where clay was scarce or not traditionally employed for writing purposes. The Aramaic language and its legal jargon, presumably in widespread local use, were officially accepted and employed alongside Assyrian (Fales 2007; Lipiński 2010), whereas precious little is as yet known of legal traditions that other subjected peoples – from Egyptians to Anatolians to Medes – could have brought with them, piecemeal or as deported communities, and used within the empire’s confines. On the other hand, Assyrian law seems to have influenced communities abroad, leaving its traces over time and space: thus, the legal terminology and phraseology of deeds in Aramaic from Elephantine (Egypt) of Achaemenid date displays some NA features (Muffs 2003: 173–94); and NA covenants (see the case study below) could have had a determining influence on the composition of some passages of the Biblical book of Deuteronomy (Radner 2006).

Organs of legislation

No collection of NA laws has come down to us, or happens to be recalled/quoted in the clay tablets of this age: this overall silence also rules out the possible existence of such collections on perishable media, such as wooden/

ivory writing boards or on papyrus/leather scrolls. There is no apparent reason for this state of affairs, also because we know from archeological finds that both palace and other official libraries kept exemplars of law codes from previous periods (Radner 2003: 883). As a consequence, however, the Assyrian king came to represent not only the supreme judge of the land, but also a figure of ultimate normative protection for his subordinates, whether of high or lowly status – the supreme figure in a “patrimonialist” society, by now fully undergoing multiple sectorial and personal splits in the jurisdictional and bureaucratic subdivisions of power, also due to its ever-increasing size (cf. Westbrook 2005; Fales 2012a). Although official or legal documents do not show the ruler involved in judgments, as in the MA period, letters of this age indicate that he was the object of a formal procedure, called “invoking the King’s word” (*abat šarri zakāru*), thanks to which any subject could appeal to him if they felt unfairly treated, mistreated in the personal and professional sphere, or affronted in circumstances ranging from the contractual to the ethical-religious domain (Fales 2001: 178–90). On his part, the king could use these appeals from the rank and file to curb any excess of power wielded by middle-to-high rank officials – whether civilian or military. Other letters, bearing the explicit heading “the King’s word,” bore orders in all spheres of societal life which were not to be disputed – although they could, in point of fact, be subjected to cautiously worded and formally styled argumentation on the part of the subordinates operating “in the field” (Ponchia 1989).

While the traditional term *dayyānu(m)* “judge” was no longer used for human judges in the Neo-Assyrian period, various high officials are attested in judicial roles, drawn from the ranks of state, provincial, city, and temple administration (Radner 2003: 890). Two of the “Grandeeds,” the *sukkallu* (Vizier) and the *sartinnu* (Chief Secretary) are frequently mentioned as judges, thus showing something of a specialized function, and one implying their occasional presence in cities all over the empire. Similarly to the OA and MA periods, no distinction between civil and criminal law was made. Close to one hundred judicial documents from the NA period are preserved (Jas 1996; Radner 1997–8), but they provide precious little evidence on the procedures; the rare presence of gods as “judges” (Fales 1977) might imply reference to supranatural methods of evidence.

Case study: Treaties and covenants, external and internal

As indicated above, NA international legal practices differed from those that had been in place in previous millennia, and constituted a prototype and basic template for all following imperial experiments in Western Asia. The various forms and the chronological mutations of Assyrian foreign policy between the

age of progressive territorial reconquest and the final development of the imperial system of rule are reflected here and there in official inscriptions of the rulers and in letters, and recorded in a bare dozen of exemplars of actual covenants, which have come down to us in more or less fragmentary form, dated between 825 and 625 (Parpola and Watanabe 1988: nos. 1–12). Further information on the political and ideological background to these covenants may be derived from a variety of other sources, in Akkadian (chronicle texts, border or celebrative stelae) or in other languages (royal inscriptions in Phoenician or in Aramaic; commemorative texts in Luwian; treaty-documents in Aramaic) and even in bilingual (Phoenician::Luwian, Akkadian::Aramaic) versions (Lanfranchi 2005; Fales 2008; Singer 2012).

A basic division of the treaty documents according to their different aims (Parpola 2003: 1054–6) points to four basic groups: (1) agreements of mutual assistance/friendship between Assyria and a foreign state; (2) pacts of alliance, requested by the non-Assyrian partner in view of short-/long-term political/other benefits, and thus of unbalanced character, similarly to the next group; (3) treaties of political vassalage, involving annual tribute and personal visits to the king on the part of pro-Assyrian puppet rulers of areas not, or not yet, subjected to direct Assyrian domination as provinces; (4) covenants of allegiance concerning Assyrian dynastic succession, equally imposed on vassal rulers and on Assyrian citizenry. The terminology and formulary of these different categories tended to overlap to some extent: they were all called *adê*, with a term of Aramaic origin which combined the notions of “pact of allegiance/alliance” sworn before the gods and “treaty of subordination” registered in writing (Parpola and Watanabe 1988: xv–xxv) – both of them being, as a rule, unbalanced in favor of the Assyrians. However, the same term seems to have been used elsewhere – e.g. in the contemporaneous Babylonian region (Ponchia 2002–05) – with a different acceptance, to sanction relations of non-belligerence and alliance among neighboring polities of differing socio-cultural origin; and at least one case, recorded in a letter, points to an *adê* between Assyria and Elam as equally-ranking partners (Radner 2006: 359–60). Common to all the Assyrian *adês*, albeit in varying admixtures, were the following obligations for the contracting party: devotion to the Assyrian Crown; to report any threats to the state; to side without fail with Assyria’s foreign policy; to provide military cooperation; to extradite fugitives from Assyria; to accept royal delegates; to acknowledge Assur’s divine supremacy in legal and institutional matters; to foster commercial contacts (Parpola 2003: 1058). The stipulations were followed by a clause for treaty violation, leading to lengthy and detailed curses, which defined and sanctioned the punitive measures to be meted out by individual gods (or by all the treaty gods).

A major innovation in the Assyrian use of the *adê* occurred in the seventh

century: the covenantal instrument was extended to obtain sworn oaths of loyalty in favor of the ruling dynasty. The controversial promotion of Esarhaddon as crown prince (683/682), and the ensuing bloody civil war for the succession to the murdered Sennacherib (681), seems to have stimulated the earliest exemplars of loyalty *adê*s at present known (Parpola and Watanabe 1988: nos. 3, 4; Frahm 2009: nos. 67–9), and more such texts (Parpola and Watanabe 1988: nos. 7, 8) would mark the late reign of Esarhaddon (670) and the early reign of Assurbanipal (668); due to the fragmentary state of the texts, only the recipients of the latter document are known, comprising the royal family, the aristocracy and all the Assyrians, by professional and social categories.

Even vaster was the body of recipients foreseen for the sole *adê* which has come down to us in complete form, the one promoted by Esarhaddon in early 672 for the succession of his son Assurbanipal to the Assyrian throne – whereas the heir apparent Šamaš-šumu-ukin was instead destined for the throne of Babylonia (Parpola and Watanabe 1988: no. 6). The text was retrieved in hundreds of deliberately smashed fragments near a throne-base in the temple of Nabû in Kalḫu in 1951. Its reconstitution resulted in eight parallel manuscripts of a vast eight-column tablet with 670 tightly written lines, which was headed by three different impressions of the seal of the god Assur, respectively of OA, MA, and NA date – with the latter bearing a text which describes it as the “Seal of Destinies” of ultimate sacral character (George 1986: 140–1). The sole major variant of the manuscripts lay in the names of the individuals taking the oath, corresponding to eight city-lords of the land of the Medes – known or presumed to have been subjected to political subservience by Esarhaddon himself. This factor prompted the earliest definition of the text(s) as “vassal-treaties of Esarhaddon” (Wiseman 1958). Subsequent debate hinged on these Median vassals as the exclusive focus of the extant manuscripts – whether as a purely accidental occurrence (Watanabe 1987) or to the contrary as a politically meaningful presence (Liverani 1995) – also in view of a more precise legal definition of the document (loyalty oath plus vassal treaty, or merely one of the two).

Whereas the existence of a few further fragments of the same *adê* from Assur (Frahm 2009: 135–6, with previous literature) has not substantially altered these positions, the basic contextual issues surrounding the text seem now to be cleared thanks to the discovery in 2009 at Tell Tayinat, ancient Unqi, and capital of the Assyrian province of Kullania (or Kunalia/Kunulua), of a further complete exemplar, the recipient of which was the “governor (*bēl pāhete*) of the land of Kunalia” with his subordinates (Lauinger 2012: 91, 112). Working from this exemplar discovered some 800 kilometers west of Kalḫu, it can now be firmly established that the document served as a covenant of loyalty to the Assyrian Crown in view of the planned succession of Assurbanipal, which Esarhaddon imposed on the totality of the empire, in its twofold division of

Assyrian-ruled provinces and polities subjected to vassalage. In practice, the oath was sworn in Kalḫu by all palace personnel – as we know from letters – and by the heads of the individual political units far and wide (governors or kings/chiefs), also on behalf of their dependents/subjects: in a nutshell, as Assurbanipal himself would later phrase it, by “the people of Assyria, great and small, from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea” (Borger 1996: 15, text A I 18–19). Each signatory was thereupon expected and/or enticed to take his personal copy of the covenant back “home,” and place it in a prominent position there. This procedure – such as in fact is known to have occurred at Kullania, where the tablet was located in a building identified as a temple (Lauinger 2011; Harrison-Osborne 2012) – was meant to elevate the text of the oath sworn before Assur to the status of an institutional emblem of Assyrian political unity and dynastic continuity. And not by chance, beginning with this period, the *adê* itself became a quasi-divine symbol which could be the object of a sworn oath in deeds, and could thus retaliate in turn against the legal offender, as may for example be read in an Aramaic penalty clause: “Whoever will open his mouth – the life of the king and his loyalty oath (ḥyy mlk’ w’ dwh) will hold him responsible” (Fales et al. 1996: 99–100).

Finally, the discovery of the Kullania exemplar of the covenant has opened up new possible scenarios also regarding the much-discussed Median rulers. The fact that the only copies of the *adê* found at Kalḫu were written on behalf of this homogeneous group of vassals might be explained by the possibility that – in contrast to all others – they failed to attend the ceremony, perhaps by deliberate choice. Thus the texts prepared for them could have been locally archived, in anticipation of a future occasion – which however never took place. Whether it was the Medes themselves who, during the final conquest of Kalḫu in 612, painstakingly reduced to bits the tablets sanctioning their forebears’ status as vassals of the Assyrian empire (as suggested by M.E.L. Mallowan in Wiseman 1958: i–ii) is impossible to say.

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Further Reading

Recent all-round works on the subject of ancient Near Eastern Law, comprising many chapters on Assyrian law of various periods, are Westbrook (ed.) 2003 and, in Italian, Liverani and Mora (eds.) 2008. For a handy collection of translations of the Mesopotamian “law codes” and other collections of juridical material, see Roth 1997. On specific aspects of juridical procedure, see, e.g., Bellotto and Ponchia (eds.) 2009. For legal-institutional aspects of various periods of Assyrian history see, inter alia, Dercksen 2004 (Old Assyrian) and Postgate 2007 (Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian). For the role of the god Assur in Middle/Neo-Assyrian law and institutions, see Holloway 2002. On the “loyalty oaths” of Esarhaddon from Nimrud/Kalḫu, and their newly discovered counterpart from Tell Tayinat, see most recently Fales 2012b. Fales 2015 is the most recent treatment of Sennacherib’s “Seal of Destinies” and its implications.

CHAPTER 23

Assyrian Cities and Architecture

John M. Russell

Introduction

Throughout its history, Assyrian architecture was constructed almost exclusively of mud brick. Large structures were often built atop mud brick foundations or foundation platforms. Limestone is plentiful in Assyria, but was used architecturally primarily in structures that were exposed to running water, such as river walls and aqueducts, or for defensive purposes, as facing for fortification walls. Major exterior doorways were usually marked by projecting gate towers and in the later periods were often crowned with arches of mud brick. Most interior floors were of beaten earth, which in important rooms must have been covered with reed mats and carpets. Floors exposed to the elements, as in courtyards and terraces, or subjected to running water, as in the rooms conventionally called “bathrooms,” were paved, either with baked bricks or with stone slabs. These paving bricks and slabs are sometimes inscribed and are one of our most plentiful sources of information concerning the identity of royal builders. Roofs were supported on wooden beams, capped by reed mats and a layer of mud. In the cases of very large rooms, the Assyrian kings tell us that roofing timbers were of cedar imported from Lebanon. Small rooms, such as the underground royal tombs in the Northwest Palace at Kalḫu, were sometimes roofed with vaults of baked brick.

There are three types of primary evidence for Assyrian architecture. The first is the buildings themselves, recovered through archaeological excavations at Assyrian sites. Sometimes such a building contains inscriptions built into its fabric – usually on bricks, paving tiles, or foundation inscriptions – that identify its builder. In the absence of such texts, the date of construction may be conjectured based on stratigraphy or similarities to dated buildings. The second type of evidence is inscriptions that were once part of a structure, but excavated in secondary context. In the Neo-Assyrian period, such textual evidence is occasionally augmented by letters and administrative texts. Often such documents provide sufficient detail that we may be confident that the building described existed at the site, even if no trace of the physical structure survives. The third type of evidence is documentation by a later king of the construction activities of his forbears. This usually occurs when a king finds documents from an earlier builder in a building he is reconstructing. In such cases the later king lists the previous builders in the written account of his

own work.

The city wall of Ashur provides excellent examples of all three types of evidence. A clay foundation cone of the Middle Assyrian king Aššur-rem-nišešu found embedded in a section of the city wall that he restored lists previous builders of the wall as Kikkiya, Ikunum, Sargon I, Puzur-Aššur II, and Aššur-nirari I. Aššur-nirari's work is confirmed by a clay cone of his that was found in the city wall, but this is the only record that the other four kings worked on the wall. Much later, the Neo-Assyrian king Shalmaneser III, who did extensive work on the wall, reported that previous builders included Kikkiya, Ikunum, Puzur-Aššur III, Adad-nirari I, Tukulti-Ninurta I, and Tiglath-pileser I (Grayson 1987: 86, 101; 1996: 55, 58). The work of the last four kings is confirmed by their own texts, found both in primary and secondary contexts at Ashur, while Shalmaneser may have copied the first two from cones of Aššur-rem-nišešu.

Ashur in the Third Millennium BCE

Originally, the Assyrians were the people of the city of Ashur (modern Qal'at Širqaṭ), cult city of the god Assur and political capital of the land of Ashur (Assyria). Ashur is sited on a stone bluff on the west bank of the Tigris river 100 kilometers south of Mosul (ancient Nineveh). The site has excellent natural defenses, as the Tigris flowed beneath the north and east sides of the city in antiquity, so only its southwest – landward – side required extensive fortifications (Figure 23.1). Due to its location at the southern margin of the rain-fed agricultural zone, dry farming is unreliable here, but to the north and east of the city the Tigris valley opens out into a broad basin where irrigation is practical. Located just north of the rugged Jebel Makhul–Jebel Ḥamrin ridge, it is a natural crossroads for major trade routes connecting Anatolia, Babylonia, and Iran, and was also able to benefit from trade with nomadic groups that migrated along the northern fringe of the desert (Oates 1968: 7, 14–15, 19–21).

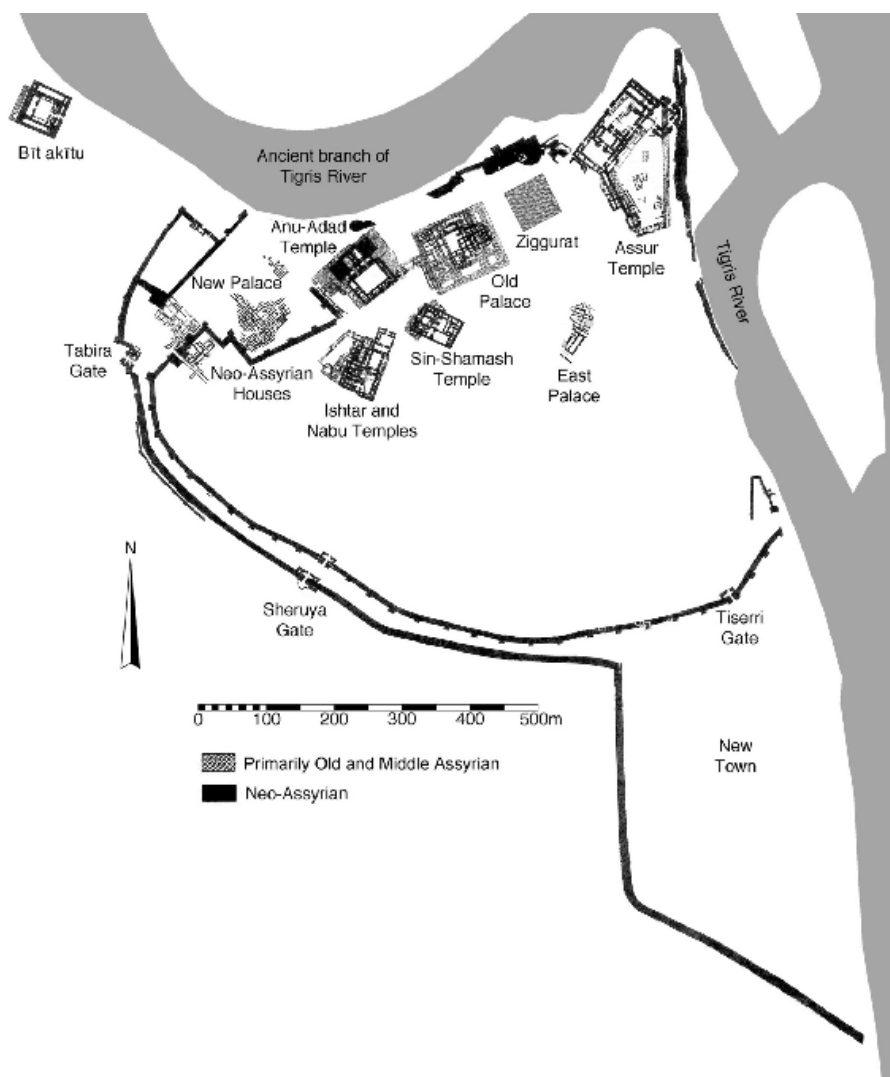


Figure 23.1 Ashur, city plan; adapted by the author from Andrae 1938: Beilage.

Because of the relatively compressed stratigraphy in the oldest part of Ashur its earliest settlement history is unknown. The oldest excavated structure was the temple of Ištar of Ashur. Five levels, designated D, E, F, G, and H, were found superimposed over one another. Temple G was built on the wall stumps of temple H, the earliest level, and their plans were similar. Both had a courtyard entered from the west, surrounded by subsidiary rooms. Running parallel to the court on its east side was a rectangular cella, at the north end of which was a shallow cult chamber with a platform against its rear wall (cella plus cult chamber: 15 × 6 meters). Level F actually represents the later floor levels in Temple G, so Bär redesignated this level “GF” to indicate its continuity with G. The destruction debris of G included statues similar to

Early Dynastic IIIB examples from Mari (ca. 2400 BCE), and these have been used to date temple G to that period, while a female head in Akkadian or Ur III style from the GF debris suggests that the temple continued in use at least into the Akkadian period (Andrae 1922: 5–21, 27–97; Bär 2003a: 41–65, 316–17; 2003b).

In the Ur III period, an inscription on a pierced stone plaque states that Zarriqum, governor of Ashur during the rule of king Amar-Suen (2046–2038 BCE), built the temple of the goddess Belat-ekallim. Since this object was deliberately placed in the Ištar temple of Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243–1207 BCE), it seems probable that this text refers to the Ištar temple of the Ur III period. This should be Ištar Temple level E, which Bär assigned to the Ur III period. Its cella and cult chamber were similar in plan to those of levels G and H, but larger, measuring 22 × 7.5 meters. Temple E was raised on a platform (the debris of the earlier temples) and its entrance was marked by gate towers and a stairway (Grayson 1987: 9; Andrae 1922: 21–5, 97–111; Bär 2003a: 65–73, 317).

The other third millennium temple was the Assur temple, located on the bluff at the northern end of the city. The remains of its earliest periods were poorly preserved, but the excavators were able to distinguish three levels prior to its rebuilding by Šamši-Adad I (1813–1781 BCE). The earliest level was represented by scattered walls, which because of their differing orientations and elevations must belong to several phases. These walls were associated with fire pits that seem to have been used for sacrifice, and in the area of the later sanctuary was found a group of copper-alloy implements and figurines that may be a temple hoard or foundation deposit, dated by Haller to the end of the Early Dynastic period (ca. 2400 BCE) and by Wartke to the last quarter of the third millennium (Haller and Andrae 1955: 9–12; Wartke, in Harper et al. 1995: 37).

The next level of the Assur temple, E, had at least two phases. Though the level E plans are fragmentary, they clearly belong to a monumental building, and at least one phase already seems to have the general plan of a central court to the north and a large outer court to the southeast that would characterize the later periods of the Assur temple. Much later, Shalmaneser I listed Ušpia, who may have ruled between the Old Akkadian and Ur III periods (ca. 2150 BCE), as the first builder of the Assur temple. One of the level E phases may therefore be Ušpia's work, though none of his inscriptions were found during the excavations (Haller and Andrae 1955: 12–14; Grayson 1987: 185, 189).

The line of the city wall in the third millennium is unknown, as the only preserved remains were at the north near the Assur temple. It must have included the Assur and Ištar temples, but may not have extended as far south and west as it did in the second millennium (Andrae 1922: 95–6, 147, Taf. V). On the basis of the archaeological evidence, therefore, Ashur in the later third

millennium must already have been an important trading center with at least two temples and a town wall.

The Old-Assyrian Period

The first Assyrian Kings (ca. 2040–1809 BCE)

During the Old Assyrian period Ashur was a thriving commercial center with trading colonies in Anatolia. With increasing wealth came a sustained campaign by its kings to improve the city's fortifications. The first recorded builder of the wall is Kikkiya (ca. 2025 BCE), but this is known only from texts of later kings. The earliest original inscriptions documenting work on the wall belong to Ilušuma (died 1974 BCE), who says that the god Assur opened up two new springs in the city of Ashur, and Ilušuma used this water for making bricks to build a new city wall. This apparently involved expansion of the area of the city, as land for new building lots was thereby made available. His son, Erišum I (1974–1935 BCE), increased the height of his father's wall; he gives the names of two of the gates, the People's Gate and the Sheep Gate, both of which seem to be at the west. According to a much later text, Ikunum (1934–1921 BCE), Sargon I (1920–1881 BCE), and Puzur-Aššur II (1880–1873 BCE) all worked on the city wall (Grayson 1987: 17, 22, 101; 1996: 58; dates according to [Chapter 3](#) of this volume, for slightly different date cf. Barjamovic et al. 2012: 1–40). The city wall in this period probably followed roughly the line of Shalmaneser III's later inner wall, enclosing an area of some 40 hectares. Approximately the northern third of this relatively small total area was occupied by palaces and temples, and the remaining space must have been quite crowded.

The next level of the Ištar temple, D, was considerably larger than E. Its poorly preserved remains consisted of a mud brick sub-foundation, atop which was a foundation of limestone blocks. Its cella, which apparently lacked the separate cult chamber at the end, measured 34 × 8.5 meters. Bär assigned level D to the Old Assyrian period. This should, therefore, be the Ištar temple built by Ilušuma, as recorded in a number of his inscriptions found out of context at Ashur, and according to later kings subsequently restored by Sargon I (Grayson 1987: 15–18, 91, 150, 195, 257; Andrae 1922: 25–6, 111–16; 1935: 113–18; Bär 2003a: 73–82, 317; Schmitt 2012: 73–81).

Erišum I rebuilt the entire Assur temple. A number of his inscriptions, including many inscribed bricks, were found throughout the temple and were used by Haller to identify an "Erišum level." The plan of this level was also fragmentary, but in general seems to have followed level E (Grayson 1987:

15–36; Haller and Andrae 1955: 14–18). According to inscribed bricks from Ashur, a new temple dedicated to Adad was begun by Erišum I and completed by his son, Ikunum. No trace of this structure was recovered in the excavations. It may have been on the same site as the later double temple of Anu and Adad, on the north side of the city just west of the later Old Palace (Grayson 1987: 37–8, 41–2).

Curiously, there is no mention of a palace in inscriptions of any of the Old Assyrian kings. A building that is probably the earliest palace of Ashur was beneath the Old Palace, southwest of the Assur temple on the north side of the city. The small part that was excavated was a well-built, apparently monumental building with stone foundations and a large court paved with baked bricks laid on a gravel bed. There were no building inscriptions, but the foundations were at a level that seemed to be of Ur III or Old Assyrian date (Miglus 1989: 107–15; Pedde, Lundström, and Frahm 2008: 27–9). On the eve of Šamši-Adad's conquest, therefore, Ashur was a prosperous fortified city some 40 hectares in area, packed with houses and having a palace and temples dedicated to Assur, Ištar, and Adad.

Šamši-Adad I (1808–1776 BCE)

Ashur was conquered by the foreign king Šamši-Adad I who made it one of the principal cities of his extensive realm. In the process, he leveled and replaced all but one of Ashur's public buildings, transforming the northern face of the city into something resembling a Babylonian metropolis. Šamši-Adad demolished and completely rebuilt the Assur temple, giving it the size and general form that it would retain until the end of the Assyrian empire. The main part of the temple was a rectangle measuring 108 × 54 meters, oriented with the corners toward the cardinal points. At the southwest end was an entrance leading into a smallish forecourt, on the opposite side of which was the entrance into a large central court. On the northeast side of the central court was an entrance that opened into an antechamber, beyond which was the cella (28 × 8 meters). On the southeast side of the temple was a large trapezoidal outer court (maximum dimensions: 190 × 70 meters). The ensemble completely filled the triangular space of the projecting bluff (Grayson 1987: 48–51, 60–3; Haller and Andrae 1955: 18–37; Miglus 2001).

Šamši-Adad also seems to have built the first ziggurat for the Assur temple, located some 85 meters southwest of the temple and with an orientation somewhat different from that of the temple. Andrae distinguished two building phases, both about 61 meters square. There was no evidence in either phase for the means of access to the upper stages. Andrae assigned the first phase to Šamši-Adad I on the basis of brick size and color. In view of this king's work on the neighboring Assur temple and, probably, Old Palace it

seems plausible that he built the ziggurat as well (Haller and Andrae 1955: 2; Miglus 1985).

Just southwest of the ziggurat, directly over the remains of the earlier palace, was the Old Palace. Only its mud brick foundation survived – there was no trace of superstructure. The full plan was recovered. It was nearly square, measuring 112×98 meters, and consisted of 172 rooms and ten courtyards. There were no doorways in the foundations, so the circulation pattern is a matter for conjecture. No inscriptions were recovered in the excavations of the Old Palace that identify its builder. Because the foundation trenching and mud brick size were the same as were used in the Assur temple, Andrae identified the builder of the Old Palace as Šamši-Adad I, and the presence of displaced Assur and Adad temple bricks of Erišum I in the fill on which it was built supports this date (Andrae 1912: 22; 1977: 139; Preusser 1955: 6–13; Miglus 1989: 115–20; Pedde, Lundström, and Frahm 2008: 28–32).

Completing his transformation of the north side of the city, according to a Middle Assyrian text Šamši-Adad I rebuilt the Anu-Adad temple with two ziggurats, which presumably means that at that time it was dedicated to both gods. Nothing survives from this phase of the building (Grayson 1987: 80–1). Directly opposite the Anu-Adad temple was the double temple of Sîn and Šamaš. Andrae recovered three building levels, the earliest of which had mud-brick foundations that were almost completely preserved. The building was roughly rectangular, measuring 62×32 meters, with an entrance facade on one of the long sides that stepped outward from the ends toward a towered gate in the center. The building was planned around a central courtyard with the entrance in one of its long sides. The two identical shrines opened off the two short side walls of the court. The earliest known inscription that refers to the Sîn-Šamaš temple is a brick of Aššur-nirari I, but the bricks in the foundation and the courtyard were identical to those used by Šamši-Adad I in the Assur temple, so both Haller and Miglus attributed the Sîn-Šamaš temple to him (Haller and Andrae 1955: 84–6, Taf. 16–18; Miglus 1990; Werner 2009: 14–22, plans 1–2).

Šamši-Adad also ruled over Nineveh, located on the left bank of the Tigris 100 kilometers north of Ashur opposite modern Mosul in northern Iraq. Nineveh is one of the oldest and most important cities of the upper Tigris region. Surrounded by rich, well-watered farm land, Nineveh is the site of the most popular ancient Tigris ford and consequently controlled major trade routes in all directions (Oates 1968: 21). The oldest part of the city is the large mound of Kuyunjik, about 40 hectares in area, located at the former junction of the Tigris and Khosr rivers (Figure 23.2). The pottery sequence here dates back to the Hassuna period (ca. 6000–5500 BCE). Later the smaller (about 15 hectares) mound of Nebi Yunus about one kilometer to the south was incorporated into the city area.

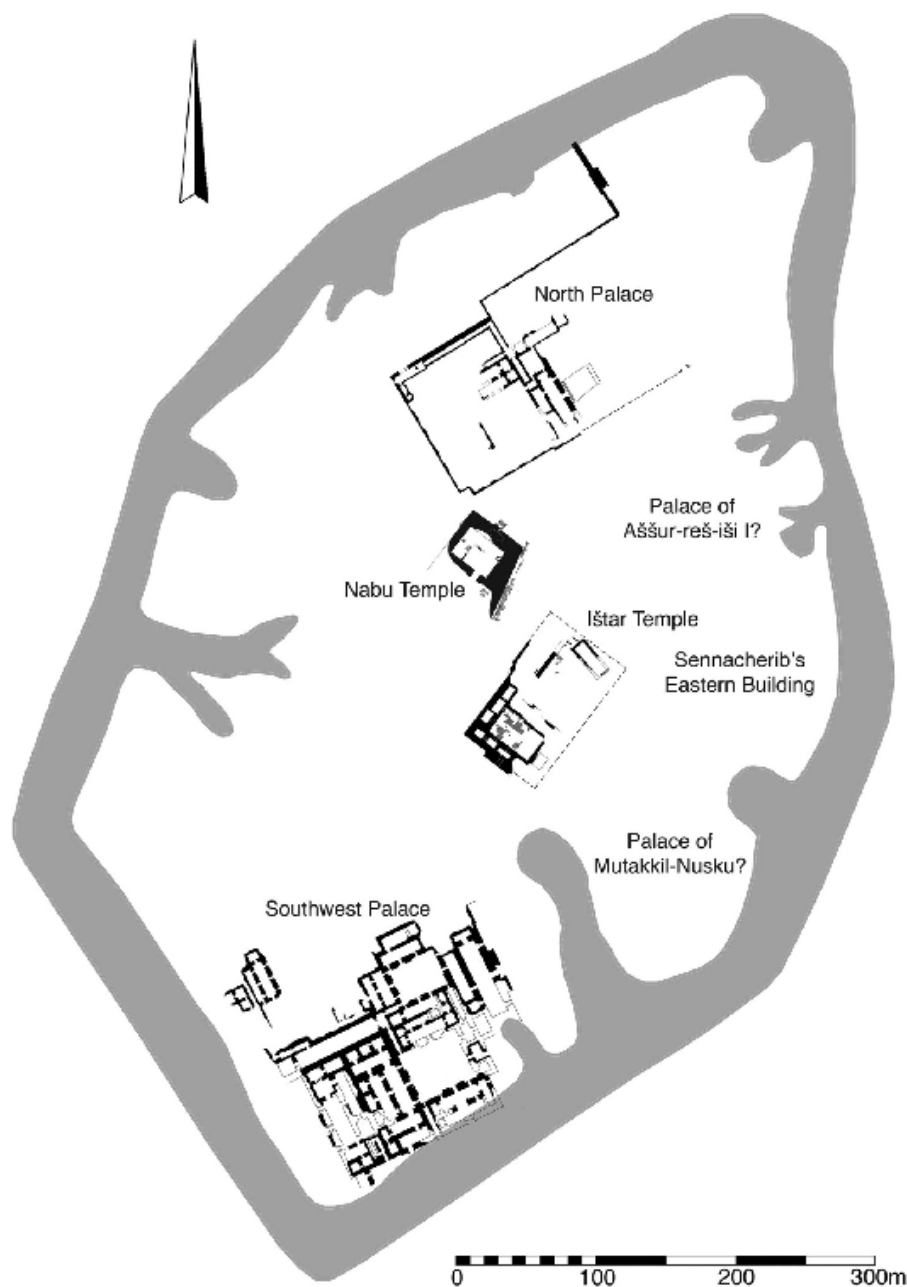


Figure 23.2 Nineveh, plan of the mound of Kuyunjik.

Source: author.

Šamši-Adad I placed his distinctive architectural stamp on Nineveh's principal shrine, the Istar temple. A number of fragmentary inscribed stone cylinders of Šamši-Adad I from the temple area report that he rebuilt the temple and its ziggurat. Reade associated this construction with a temple foundation platform that measured at least 45 by 90 meters, built of mud

bricks of the same size as those used by Šamši-Adad I at Ashur. Also like Šamši-Adad's buildings at Ashur, the building had mud brick foundations under the walls and loose earth fill under the floors of the rooms. The plan was preserved only at the southwest end, and there only at the foundation level, but it is clear that this end consisted of a single rank of rooms surrounding a courtyard. On the northwest and southwest side were projecting foundations that Reade suggested supported pairs of gate towers. Reade observed that the preserved remains of the Ištar temple at Nineveh are virtually identical in scale and plan to Šamši-Adad's new Assur temple at Ashur, and proposed that the two buildings were designed by the same person (Grayson 1987: 51–5; Reade 2005: 362–6).

The Transition Period (17th to 15th centuries BCE)

After Šamši-Adad's reign, Ashur entered a period of obscurity until about 1500 BCE. The only written reference to the city of Ashur in this period is in an unusual text of Puzur-Sîn (ca. 1700 BCE), a king who is otherwise unknown. Puzur-Sîn says here that he came to power by deposing Asinum, grandson of Šamši-Adad I, whose dynasty was “not of the flesh of the city of Ashur, and who had destroyed the shrines of the city Ashur.” Puzur-Sîn says he then destroyed that “improper thing,” the palace of Šamši-Adad, and built a wall, the location of which is unknown. It appears from this that Puzur-Sîn needed a cheap or quick source of bricks and that the most readily available source was Šamši-Adad's palace. If Puzur-Sîn not only destroyed the palace, but dismantled it as well, that would explain why only the foundation walls survived and why there was so little occupation and superstructure debris found in it (Grayson 1987: 77–8; Reade 2001: 6–8; Pedde, Lundström, and Frahm 2008: 32).

There ensues a gap of roughly 150 years in our building records from Ashur, followed by a resurgence of activity during the second part of the 16th and first part of the 15th centuries BCE. Much of this activity focused on the city's fortifications. A later repairer of the wall reports that Aššur-nirari I worked on the city wall, and one of his inscribed cones was found in the northwest part of the wall. His son, Puzur-Aššur III, claims to have repaired the wall near the Step Gate of the Assur temple. In addition, later kings credit Puzur-Aššur with a major project, the construction of the wall surrounding the New Town, which added some 15 hectares to the southeast corner of the city (Grayson 1987: 85–7, 90–1, 99–101, 143–4, 147–8).

All of Ashur's public buildings were also restored during this period. According to a later king, the temple of Anu and Adad was restored by Šamši-

Adad III, and a text that may be his refers to the restoration of its ziggurats. Aššur-nirari I says he repaired the Assur temple and he apparently also restored the Sîn-Šamaš temple, unless he was actually its original builder. In addition, according to Shalmaneser I (1273–1244 BCE), the Old Palace was rebuilt by Aššur-nirari I, and a clay cone with a palace inscription of this king was found on the surface at Ashur. Finally, the temple of Ištar of Ashur was restored by Puzur-Aššur III, but his work was apparently not extensive and cannot be identified in the archaeological remains (Grayson 1987: 80–1, 83–5, 88–89, 91, 199; 1991: 28).

The Middle Assyrian Period

Aššur-bel-nišešu to Aššur-uballiṭ I (1407–1318 [1417–1328] BCE)

During the Middle Assyrian Period, Assyria witnessed three surges in building activity. The first occurred in Ashur during the reigns of Aššur-bel-nišešu through Aššur-uballiṭ I and apparently accompanied the resurgence of the city toward the end of Mitannian rule. Again, a major focus was the repair of the fortifications. Aššur-rem-nišešu and Enlil-nirari rebuilt parts of the main city wall and Aššur-bel-nišešu repaired the wall of the New Town. According to later kings, Aššur-nadin-aḥḥe (II?) and Eriba-Adad I also worked on the wall of the New Town and Aššur-uballiṭ I rebuilt the northern quay wall (Grayson 1987: 99–102, 118–19, 145, 147; 1991: 38).

There is relatively little documentation for work on Ashur's temples during this period. Aššur-uballiṭ I says he restored the Ištar temple and placed the goddess inside it. By contrast, considerable attention was devoted to the Old Palace. According to later kings, Aššur-nadin-aḥḥe rebuilt or restored the Old Palace, and his inscribed palace bricks were found in its central court. Work was continued by Eriba-Adad I, who built its gatehouse. Aššur-uballiṭ I renovated a palace, apparently located in the New Town, and in one of the Amarna Letters he asks the Egyptian king to send him gold to help pay for his new palace (Grayson 1987: 105–6, 109–13, 152; 1991: 105; Moran 1992: 39, EA 16).

A text of a later king reports that Aššur-uballiṭ I restored the Ištar temple at Nineveh, and fragmentary inscriptions probably belonging to Aššur-uballiṭ support this, providing evidence that he also ruled over Nineveh (Grayson 1987: 115–16, 206). Since the Middle Assyrian superstructure of the Ištar temple at Nineveh was completely leveled in the course of restorations in the Neo-Assyrian period, no archaeological remains survived that could be

associated with Aššur-uballit's work.

Adad-nirari I to Tukulti-Ninurta I (1295–1197 [1305–1207] BCE)

The 13th century BCE saw major construction activity at Ashur. Adad-nirari I carried out large-scale renovations on the walls, rebuilding the city wall by the Assur ziggurat, the quay wall, and the wall of the New Town on both the land and river sides. He restored several parts of the Old Palace, as evidenced by the distribution of his inscribed bricks, several of which give the name of the part of the palace in which they were used. He also restored the Assur temple. Finally, he repaired the weakened parts of the temple of Ištar of Ashur, as reported in five limestone tablets evidently originally placed in its foundations (Grayson 1987: 128, 138–57, 162–74). This was apparently still the Old Assyrian level D temple, which by now would have been at least 670 years old! His grandson, Tukulti-Ninurta I, removed these tablets when he leveled the old Ištar temple and reburied them in the foundation of his new Ištar temple.

The Assur temple was destroyed by fire during the reign of Shalmaneser I, who completely rebuilt it. In general, his new temple followed the plan of Šamši-Adad's temple, but Shalmaneser added a courtyard to the southwest end of the temple, bringing its total length up to 140 meters. The southwest wall of the great outer court was moved further to the southwest to accommodate the temple's additional length. According to Adad-nirari I, his father Arik-den-ili built a new ziggurat of Assur, and Adad-nirari says he also worked on it. Shalmaneser I also reports that he rebuilt the Assur ziggurat, and metal disks inscribed with his name were excavated in foundation deposits at the corners of the second of the ziggurat's two construction phases, suggesting that he is the king primarily responsible for that phase.

Shalmaneser I also rebuilt a gate in the city wall near the Assur temple and continued his father's work on the Old Palace and the temple of Ištar (Grayson 1987: 148, 157, 159, 185–95, 198–200, 204, 211–12; Haller and Andrae 1955: 3, 37–52; Miglus 1985).

In the first year of his reign, Tukulti-Ninurta I demolished the old Ištar temple, which he reports was at that time 720 years old, and rebuilt it to the north of its former site. In a remarkable text found in the temple, Tukulti-Ninurta reports that he created an entirely new building at the request of the goddess. The entrance to the temple court was in its old location on the west wall, but the orientation of the temple itself was altered so that the entrance to the cella now faced north. The king also added an antechamber with gate towers at its entrance in front of the cella. The dimensions of the temple, excluding the courtyard, were 51 × 39 meters, and those of the main cella were 32.5 × 8.5 m.

At the west end of the cella was a platform two meters high, access to which was via a staircase of sixteen steps. At the southwest corner of the temple was a smaller shrine, entered directly from the courtyard, dedicated to the goddess Dinitu, who was perhaps a form of Ištar (Grayson 1987: 253–6; Andrae 1935: 15–108; Schmitt 2012: 26–68).

Tukulti-Ninurta I completely rebuilt the Šîn-Šamaš temple. Haller attributed the stone foundations of the second level to this campaign. Though only about half of the foundations of this phase were preserved, they closely follow the plan of the earlier building. The king also repaired the city wall and dug a ditch in front of the wall on the south and west sides. He continued his father's work on the Old Palace, and a later king credits him with rebuilding its gatehouse (Grayson 1987: 247, 265–7; 1991: 44; Haller and Andrae 1955: 86–9, Taf. 16–18; Werner 2009: 14–18, 22–4, plans 1–2). Tukulti-Ninurta built a great new palace as well. In several texts from Ashur, he reports that he took a plot of land on the north side of Ashur between the Adad ziggurat and the Tabira Gate, built a foundation platform of limestone blocks and mud brick, and erected on it his New Palace. This platform measured some 165 × 200 meters, though its northwest half was largely eroded away. The remains of the New Palace on the surviving part of the terrace were very badly disturbed, and Andrae did not attempt a reconstruction, only stating that the preserved sections of foundations indicated a monumental structure with walls two meters thick (Grayson 1987: 237–46, 282; Preusser 1955: 30–1).

Tukulti-Ninurta I also took the unprecedented step of founding a new capital city, which he named after himself, Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta (“Port Tukulti-Ninurta”), on the east bank of the Tigris River three kilometers north of Ashur. The inner city was roughly square, about 0.8 km on each side, with an area of 62 hectares. The west side was protected by the Tigris, and on the other sides was a massive inner city wall with at least four gates. An archaeological survey in 1986 located the earthen rampart of the outer town some 1.5 kilometers south of the inner wall, bringing the known area of the city up to 240 hectares. The original area must be larger still, as the west and north outer boundaries of the city have not yet been identified. A small temple some 700 meters north of the inner city is evidence that the city extended well to the north. In the northwest quarter of the inner city were a temple and a palace. The temple, called “the temple of totality of Assur,” was dedicated to Assur, Adad, Šamaš, Ninurta, Nusku, Nergal, the Seven gods, and Ištar. It consisted of a lower temple (52 × 53 m) built against a ziggurat (30 × 30 m). The lower temple, which finds its closest parallels in Babylonia, was planned around a square courtyard, with the main entrance hall at the east opposite the principal cult chamber at the west against the ziggurat. The height of the ziggurat and the character of any architecture atop it are unknown. Two sections of the palace were excavated. At the northwest corner of the inner city was the “North Palace” (80 × 65 m) with a gate chamber, two large

reception rooms, and several smaller rooms. Just to the north, possibly part of the same building, was a large courtyard paved with rhomboid tiles and surrounded by rooms that its excavators identified as shrines. Some 140 meters to the southeast was the “South Palace,” of which only the mud brick terrace was preserved (75 × 37 m). At the foot of the north and south sides of the terrace were fragmentary wall paintings, fallen from the rooms above (Grayson 1987: 269–78, 285–7; Andrae 1925: 13–20, pls. 1–4; Eickhoff 1985; Dittmann 1990, 2011; Mühl and Sulaiman 2011: 380–3, pls. XXVIII–XXIX; Beuger 2011).

Shalmaneser I and Tukulti-Ninurta I both acknowledged the importance of Nineveh, as evidenced by both kings’ work on the temple of Ištar there. Shalmaneser I says that the walls, gate towers, and ziggurat of the temple were badly damaged by an earthquake and that he rebuilt them. This project was apparently finished by Tukulti-Ninurta I, as recorded on his inscribed bricks from the site. Also at Nineveh, a few palace brick fragments were stamped with the names of Shalmaneser I and Tukulti-Ninurta I. It is not known whether these fragments mean these kings built a palace at Nineveh, or if they derive from work on the Ištar temple (Grayson 1987: 206–8, 212–13, 216–18, 284–5, 287–9; Reade 2005: 371–2). According to a later king, Shalmaneser I also built, or rebuilt, the city of Kalḫu (Grayson 1991: 222).

Aššur-reša-iši I to Aššur-bel-kala (1132–1056 BCE)

The final flourishing of construction activity at Ashur during the Middle Assyrian Period, including restoration work on the major temples and the palace, occurred during the reigns of Aššur-reša-iši I, Tiglath-pileser I, and Aššur-bel-kala. The first two kings were also very active at Nineveh, and this is the first period when we have clear documentation of Assyrian palaces built at Nineveh. In this period, therefore, Assyria had essentially two main centers – the traditional cult and administrative center of Ashur in the south and the newly-renovated, strategically-located commercial and military center of Nineveh in the north.

Tiglath-pileser I reports that when the old Anu-Adad temple became dilapidated, it was pulled down by Aššur-dan I and was not rebuilt. Only a small section of the stone foundation of this first temple survived beneath the southeast side of the later temple. Aššur-reša-iši I laid the foundations of a new temple of Anu and Adad, and its construction was completed by Tiglath-pileser I. A considerable part of its foundations survived. The temple measured 110 × 84 meters, including the ziggurats. Its entrance was in the long wall of a rectangular courtyard. On the opposite side of this were two identical shrines, side-by-side, flanked by two ziggurats, each 37 meters square (Grayson 1987: 317–18; 1991: 28–31, 64–6; Andrae 1909: 3–38).

Aššur-reša-iši also rebuilt the Ištar temple, and as before, the new structure was built in a new location. Inscribed bricks of Aššur-reša-iši I that describe him as “builder of the temple of Ištar of Ashur” were found built into the cult platform in the cella of a temple located some 30 meters northeast of Tukulti-Ninurta’s temple. This new Ištar temple was smaller, its cella measuring 20 × 7 meters. Tiglath-pileser I says he completed the reconstruction of the Ištar temple (Grayson 1987: 318; 1991: 26; Andrae 1935: 109–12; Schmitt 2012: 69–72).

Tiglath-pileser I rebuilt considerable areas of the Old Palace, including a new gatehouse, the main door of which was decorated with basalt statues of a sea animal and a mountain animal. He reports that he lined the walls of this palace with slabs of basalt, limestone, and alabaster. This is the first reference to wall slabs and sculptures of protective figures located in the entrances of an Assyrian palace. Numerous fragments of inscribed unsculptured wall slabs and possibly also some fragments from the sculptures were recovered in excavations on the Old Palace. Aššur-bel-kala rebuilt the palace storage areas and the large terrace on the north side, and continued work on the gatehouse, adding stone statues of sea animals, mountain animals, lions, and human-headed bulls (Grayson 1991: 44–5, 104–5; Lundström and Orlamünde 2011).

The Middle Assyrian phases of the Old Palace were not well-preserved and the excavators were not usually able to separate the architectural work of one king from another. In the pavement of the central court, Miglus distinguished three phases on the basis of inscribed bricks: the lowest he dated to before Adad-nirari I, the middle to Tukulti-Ninurta I or later, and the upper to Tiglath-pileser I. The plan as published probably represents the final form of the palace after the restorations of Tiglath-pileser I and Aššur-bel-kala. Though the plan is very fragmentary, it is clear that the Middle Assyrian palace was roughly the same size as the Old Assyrian palace, but its general layout was different and its rooms were larger (Preusser 1955: 13–19; Miglus 1989: 124; Pedde, Lundström, and Frahm 2008: 32–7).

Aššur-bel-kala was the last king in this period to claim to have carried out extensive reconstruction projects, often closely paralleling the projects of Tiglath-pileser I. In addition to his work on the Old Palace, he restored the large terrace “before the forecourts” of Tukulti-Ninurta I’s New Palace. He also claims to have worked on the Anu-Adad temple, to have restored the quay wall, city wall, and at least two gates, and to have cleaned out Tukulti-Ninurta I’s ditch. Aššur-bel-kala was also the first king known to have built his tomb on the southeastern side of the palace in an area that would be used by several later kings (Grayson 1991: 94, 101, 104–5, 109–10; Haller, Andrae, and Hrouda 1954: 176–7, Taf. 42–3; Lundström 2009: 73–93).

Several inscriptions from Nineveh document work by Tiglath-pileser I on what appears to be an elaborate palace complex comprising up to three palaces and a garden. The most complete text begins with the construction of

a terrace rising above the Khosr river, its side faced with stone slabs. A number of inscribed Tiglath-pileser bricks from Nineveh also derive from the Khosr river wall. The text next states that Tiglath-pileser completed a palace begun by his father, Aššur-reša-iši I, and decorated it with colored glazed bricks and placed images of date palms on its gate towers. Aššur-reša-iši bricks found at Nineveh also refer to his palace. The Tiglath-pileser text continues that he planted a garden by the terrace and irrigated it with a canal he dug from the Khosr. In that garden the king built a palace and depicted therein his “victory and might,” possibly in images. The building report concludes with a statement that he restored the palace of his grandfather, Mutakkil-Nusku, which was located on the terrace beside the Ištar temple. In another text that refers to one of these palaces, Tiglath-pileser says that he placed statues of a sea animal and mountain animal at its entrance and named it “Palace of the King of the Four Quarters” (Grayson 1987: 315–16; 1991: 54–7, 66–8; Reade 1998–2001: 411, 416; Maul 2000: 23–6).

Based on these texts, there appear to have been two palaces on the terrace above the Khosr and a third one below in the garden beside the terrace. These buildings have not been identified in excavations at the site, but Thompson reported that King’s test trenches revealed foundations and painted bricks beneath the Late Assyrian platform on the east side of the mound, and these may derive from one of Tiglath-pileser’s palaces (Thompson and Hutchinson 1929b: 64–5).

On a number of inscribed clay cones from Nineveh, Aššur-reša-iši I says that in the time of his grandfather, Aššur-dan I, the gate towers of the Ištar temple were shaken by an earthquake and not repaired, so Aššur-reša-iši rebuilt and considerably enlarged them. Tiglath-pileser I and Šamši-Adad IV also worked on the Ištar temple. Other clay cones of Aššur-reša-iši I from Nineveh say that he restored the gate chamber(?) of the back palace, which had been damaged by the same earthquake. In the Neo-Assyrian period, this building was on the nearby mound of Nebi Yunus, and it presumably stood there in the Middle Assyrian period as well (Grayson 1987: 309–15; 1991: 59, 117–20).

The Neo-Assyrian Period

Aššur-dan II to Tukulti-Ninurta II (934–884 BCE)

Early in the Neo-Assyrian period, Aššur-dan II restored the Tabira Gate in the city wall of Ashur and Adad-nirari II repaired the quay wall by the Assur

temple. Aššur-dan II also says he completely restored the New Palace. This is the last certain reference to the New Palace (Grayson 1991: 135, 137–8, 140, 144–5).

Tukulti-Ninurta II divided his attention between Ashur and Nineveh. At Ashur, he restored the city wall and a gateway of the Assur temple, and rebuilt the wall of some palace's large terrace, which he says had previously been restored by Aššur-bel-kala. This could refer to either the Old Palace or the New Palace. A number of his inscribed palace bricks turned up at Ashur, as well as two glazed terracotta orthostats, painted with military scenes and a standard palace inscription, but all were found in secondary contexts (Grayson 1991: 167–8, 178–9, 184; Andrae 1925: 25–31, pls. 7–9).

Two headless statues of bulls in yellow limestone and part of a third in white limestone were found reused in a bridge or dam near the village of Qadhiah, 3 kilometers north-northwest of Kuyunjik. The bulls were inscribed with a Tukulti-Ninurta II text stating that they belonged to the king's palace in the city Nemed-Tukulti-Ninurta ("Abode of Tukulti-Ninurta"). The same text was on a large limestone slab found in secondary context on Kuyunjik. Remains of a baked brick pavement by the east end of Qadhiah, as well as a pottery jar with a palace inscription of Tukulti-Ninurta also found in the village, both point to Qadhiah being the site of the palace. Tukulti-Ninurta's historical texts indicate that he conducted northern campaigns from Nineveh, and presumably Nemed-Tukulti-Ninurta was a new residence he built in Nineveh's pleasant northern suburbs. This is the general backdrop against which we must view the remarkable, but not wholly unprecedented, building activities of Tukulti-Ninurta II's son, Aššurnāširpal II (Grayson 1991: 171, 179–80; Ahmad 2000; Ahmad, personal communication). Ironically, former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein coveted this same area for his Nineveh palace, so the area of the ancient pavement was bulldozed to make a modern lake surrounded by palatial residences.

Aššurnāširpal II (883–859 BCE)

At the beginning of his reign, Aššurnāširpal II seems to have maintained his father's emphasis on Nineveh. According to Aššurnāširpal's annals, at least three of his first five royal campaigns originated from Nineveh, and foreign tribute was delivered to him at Nineveh as well. Inscriptions of Aššurnāširpal II on clay cones and stone slabs from the area of the Ištar temple at Nineveh say that he completely rebuilt it. The physical remains of Aššurnāširpal's building are at the northeast end of the temple platform and include sections of pavement made of inscribed baked bricks and a section of mud brick wall. One part of this wall was faced with the remains of the lower part of a stone slab over four meters wide carved in relief with three foreigners bringing

tribute to Aššurnaširpal, and fragments of a second slab reused in the Nabû temple showed the king hunting lions and pouring an offering over a dead lion. Pieces of glazed Aššurnaširpal bricks, some with molded decoration, were found in the area immediately west of the Ištar temple, and these may have figured in the exterior decoration of the temple (Grayson 1991: 306–10; Reade 2005: 375–9).

Aššurnaširpal also carried out substantial projects at Ashur, where he completely rebuilt the Sîn-Šamaš temple. Though its remains were very fragmentary, they were sufficient for Haller to reconstruct the main lines of the plan, which was very different from the earlier phases. The entrance was in roughly the same place, but the orientation of the building had been changed slightly. It now measured roughly 65 × 46 meters, with the entrance in the short side. The entrance hall, which ran through the center of the building to a courtyard at the far end, was flanked by two shrines that could be entered either from the courtyard or from the entrance hall (Grayson 1991: 324–5, 339–40; Haller and Andrae 1955: 88–92, Taf. 16–18; Werner 2009: 18, 24–5, plan 3).

The Old Palace at Ashur was leveled and rebuilt in the Neo-Assyrian period, apparently by Aššurnaširpal II, whose inscribed bricks were found in the pavements. The preserved part of the palace measured some 60 × 60 meters, at most only about a third of its original area. Its layout seems typically Neo-Assyrian, with double ranks of rooms opening off of courtyards in the large apartments in the western section and small service rooms surrounding a courtyard in the eastern wing (Grayson 1991: 378–9; Preusser 1955: 19–27; Miglus 1989: 124; Pedde, Lundström, and Frahm 2008: 37–58; Lundström 2013). Aššurnaširpal II built his tomb near Aššur-bel-kala's at the south side of the palace, and these were later joined by three more tombs, belonging to Šamši-Adad V, and perhaps Sennacherib and Esarhaddon (Haller, Andrae, and Hrouda 1954: 170–81, Taf. 40–4; Lundström 2009).

Around his fifth year, Aššurnaširpal II began the reconstruction of the city of Kalḫu (modern Nimrud), some 35 kilometers south of Nineveh on the east bank of an ancient bed of the Tigris river just north of its confluence with the Greater Zab. Starting with his sixth year, every campaign originated from Kalḫu and it is clear that from this time forward Kalḫu was Aššurnaširpal's chief administrative city. Aššurnaširpal's preserved texts do not give the reasons for his move to Kalḫu. It is possible that the king needed a new city to accommodate a steady stream of deportees to Assyria. Kalḫu, situated well within the Assyrian rain-fed agricultural zone and surrounded by rich farmland, had the agricultural resources to support a large population. It is also easy to irrigate, due to its proximity to the Greater Zab. The Nimrud Monolith, a large stele inscribed after Aššurnaširpal's fifth year, gives the earliest account of the reconstruction of Kalḫu, reporting that the king dug a canal, planted orchards, and built a city wall and a palace. This new canal

would not have significantly increased the agricultural production of the area, but it would have enabled the city itself to become a garden spot. The emphasis on the canal in most of the Kallû building accounts shows that it was viewed as a major part of the city's appeal (Grayson 1991: 252–4; Russell 1999a: 221–5; Oates and Oates 2001: 33–5).

Aššurnaširpal's constructions included a new city wall, a royal palace, and, according to his inscriptions, nine temples. The city wall, which is for the most part still visible, forms a rough square some 7.5 kilometers in circuit and encloses an area of about 360 hectares. Aššurnaširpal's wall was apparently at least 12 meters thick and was built of mud-brick. Two main gates have been located, on the north and east walls. The citadel mound, an elevated area of some 20 hectares at the southwest corner of the city, had its own fortification wall, also of mud brick ([Figure 23.3](#)). At its northeast corner it was 37 meters wide and at least 15 meters high. The only certain gateway to the citadel was on the east side, just north of the Nabû temple (Postgate and Reade 1976–80: 307–8; Oates and Oates 2001: 27–33).

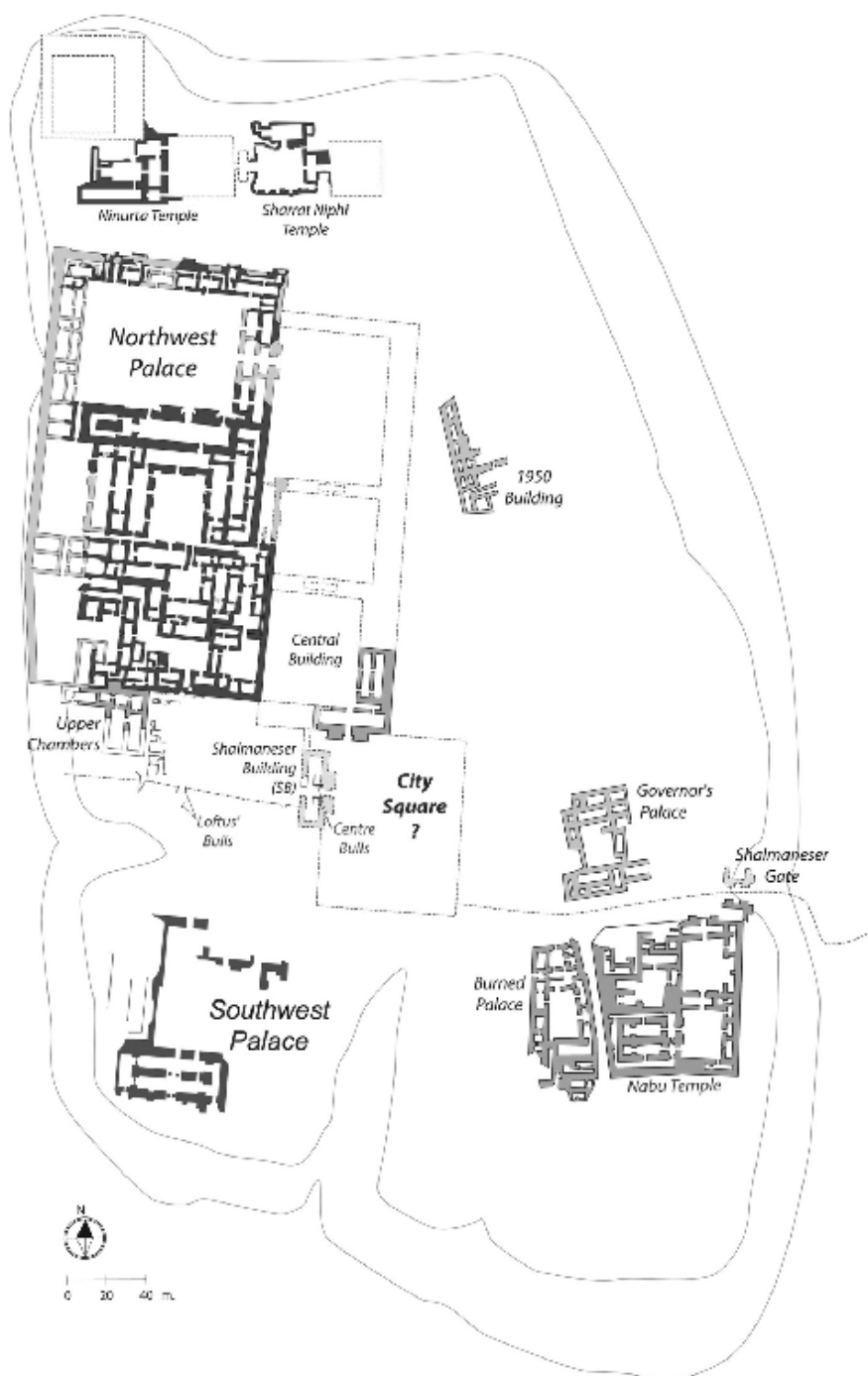


Figure 23.3 Kalḫu (modern Nimrud), plan of the citadel.

Source: Reproduced with permission of David Kertai.

The largest of Aššurnāṣirpal II's structures at Kalḫu was his palace – called the Northwest Palace by its excavator – which filled most of the northwest

quarter of the citadel. The excavated part measures 200 meters north-to-south and 120 meters east-to-west, and it may have extended further to the east as well. Its northern third was a large outer court, entered from the east, and surrounded on the north and, probably, east and west sides by offices and storerooms. The south side of the outer court was the throne-room facade, decorated with five pairs of human-headed bull and lion colossi. Beyond this were the throne-room suite and a smaller inner court, surrounded by large state apartments. The walls of all the rooms in this part of the palace were lined with stone slabs, most of which were carved with images of protective deities, rituals, campaigns, and hunts. The areas above the wall reliefs were decorated with wall paintings and glazed bricks, but these survived only in fragments. To the south of the state apartments were smaller undecorated rooms, probably domestic service areas. Two wells in this area contained a large number of ivory plaques, and four undisturbed vaulted tombs concealed beneath the floors here contained lavish grave goods, some of which belonged to Neo-Assyrian queens (Grayson 1991: 227–8, 276, 289–90; Postgate and Reade 1976–80: 311–14; Oates and Oates 2001: 36–70, 78–104; Hussein and Suleiman 2000; Hussein et al. 2016; also see [Chapter 24](#) of this volume). The Iraq State Organization for Antiquities and Heritage restored the area of the decorated state apartments as a site museum, to give visitors a chance to view a large number of reliefs and inscribed slabs in their original context, but in April 2015 it was mostly destroyed by supporters of ISIS.

Of the nine temples listed in Aššurnaširpal II's inscriptions, four – of Ninurta, Šarrat-nip̄hi, Ištar of Kidmuru, and Nabû – have been located. The Ninurta temple was at the northwest corner of the citadel, between the ziggurat and Aššurnaširpal's palace. A pair of inscribed human-headed lion colossi was in its main entrance, and other entrances had protective figures carved in relief on wall slabs. Aššurnaširpal II's inscriptions were found throughout the temple, leaving no doubt that he built it. Just east of the Ninurta temple was the temple of Ištar Šarrat-nip̄hi. Its main entrance was decorated with glazed bricks and a pair of inscribed lion colossi that identify Aššurnaširpal II as its builder, and two other entrances also contained colossi. Southeast of this was the Kidmuru temple, identified only by its doorway and altar (Grayson 1991: 291; Oates and Oates 2001: 107–10; Reade 2002a; Hussein 2008: 91–5; Hussein, Kertai, and Altaweel 2013: 104–8, pls. XLV–XLIX). The so-called Central Building at the center of the citadel is dated by inscribed reliefs to Aššurnaširpal II. It was probably a temple, though it is not known to whom it was dedicated. Its facade was decorated with colossal bulls and lions, and inside were wall reliefs showing deities (Meuszyński 1976; Sobolewski 1982a: 256–8; Oates and Oates 2001: 71–3; Hussein, Kertai, and Altaweel 2013: 96–8; Kertai 2013: 11–13).

At Imgur-Enlil (modern Balawat), Aššurnaširpal II built a temple to Mamu, the god of dreams, and a palace. Most of the temple has been excavated. It

consisted of an outer court with a small shrine opening directly off of its northeast side and the gateway to the inner court on its northwest side. The doorway to the main shrine, which had doors of wood decorated with bronze bands, was on the northwest side of the inner court. The main shrine had the standard Neo-Assyrian plan of broad antechamber and long cult room. Of the palace, only a single small room has been excavated (Oates 1974; Curtis, in Curtis and Tallis, eds. 2008: 7–22).

Shalmaneser III (858–824 BCE)

We don't know what city Shalmaneser III considered to be his residential capital at the beginning of his reign, but most of the military campaigns of his first twelve years departed from Nineveh (thereafter, the point of origin is not mentioned at all). At Nineveh, palace bricks of Shalmaneser III were found in secondary context in the area of the Ištar temple (Grayson 1996: 170; Reade 2005: 378).

At Kalḫu, Shalmaneser III worked on the Northwest Palace and either built or finished the ziggurat, which was about 60 meters square, the lower part faced with stone and the upper with baked brick. Until recently the most prominent structure still standing at Kalḫu, the ziggurat was leveled by ISIS in September–October 2016. In addition, a pair of inscribed bull gateway colossi at the center of the citadel mark the entrance to some monumental building that was apparently later demolished by Tiglath-pileser III to make way for his Central Palace. The character of this building is unknown, but the absence of the word “palace” at the beginning of the inscription suggests that it may have been a temple, perhaps part of Aššurnāṣirpal II's Central Building, which also contained pavement bricks of Shalmaneser III (Grayson 1996: 42–8, 136, 166–8; Mallowan 1952: 6–7, 11–14; Reade 2002a: 156–67; Sobolewski 1982b; Kertai 2013: 13–14).

On the east side of the citadel, just north of the later Nabû temple, was the Governor's Palace, which probably dates to late in the reign of Shalmaneser III. Texts found there indicate that it was the palace of the governors of Kalḫu from the late ninth through the eighth centuries. An area of some 50 by 60 meters was excavated, including an inner court surrounded by residential suites and offices, and the building must originally have extended considerably further to the east. Two partially excavated structures, Palace AB and the 1950 Building, are dated to Shalmaneser III on the basis of inscribed bricks (Postgate 1973b: 3–7; Postgate and Reade 1976–80: 316; Oates and Oates 2001: 130–5).

Shalmaneser III's largest project at Kalḫu was the arsenal – called the “review palace” by the later Assyrian kings and “Fort Shalmaneser” by its excavators – a huge new palace that served as a storehouse for military

equipment and tribute, and as the assembly point for the army. It was located at the southeast corner of the city, just inside the city wall, and measured some 200 by 300 meters. The structure was divided into four quadrants. The two to the north were large entrance courtyards, each surrounded by storerooms and offices. The quadrant to the southwest had been subdivided into a block of smaller courts and long rooms, probably barracks. The quadrant to the southeast had the headquarters of the palace overseer in its northwest corner and the throne-room suite on its south side. The walls of the throne room suite and other major rooms were not covered with stone slabs, nor were there colossi in the doorways (Grayson 1996: 101–14, 137, 140; Mallowan 1966: II, 369–470; Oates and Oates 2001: 144–94; Kertai 2011).

At Ashur, Shalmaneser III carried out a major rebuilding of the city walls, the visible remains of which are mostly his work. He built a new outer wall that enclosed the New Town and then followed Tukulti-Ninurta I's ditch around the south and west to the New Palace. The New Palace was apparently not in use at the time Shalmaneser III's inner wall was built, since it cuts diagonally across the northeastern side of the palace terrace. The southern quarter of the palace terrace was the site of a number of private houses later in the Neo-Assyrian period. This was the largest group of houses excavated in Ashur and it is the only place where one gets a real sense of residential life in the city. Shalmaneser III also completely rebuilt the Anu-Adad temple. About half of its plan was preserved. The temple itself was about the same length as the previous version and was laid out on the same general plan, but it was narrower and the ziggurats were much smaller, only 24 meters square (Grayson 1996: 55–8, 97–101, 115–16, 119–30, 134–5, 151–2, 156–9; Andrae 1913; Preusser 1954: 15–55; Andrae 1909: 39–78).

Shalmaneser III may have carried out work on the Old Palace as well, and he appears to have been the builder of the East Palace, a new palace southeast of the Old Palace, at the highest point on the city mound. This building, which has been only partially excavated, included one large reception suite and an even larger reception room furnished with “tramlines” for a wheeled brazier. In the final phase of this building, the doors of one of the largest rooms (41) were walled off and the room was filled with grain – the remains of which were found in the burned destruction layer – evidently in preparation for an approaching siege (Lundström 2013; Miglus 2013; Duri et al. 2013: 83–4, pls. XXXIII–XXXIVa).

Til-Barsip (modern Tell Ahmar), a walled city on the east bank of the Euphrates with an area of about 55 hectares, was a major river ford on the route from Assyria to the Mediterranean. In order to ensure unfettered access to the west, Shalmaneser III captured the city in 856 BCE and renamed it Kar-Salmanu-ašared (“Port Shalmaneser”). He built a new palace on the high mound beside the river. Its excavated dimensions were 130 × 70 m, but it was originally larger, as the south side – including most of the throne room – was

eroded away. The plan as preserved includes an entrance court, a throne-room court, and an inner court surrounded by typical reception suites. It is uncertain how much of this structure is Shalmaneser III's work and how much was added or rebuilt later. The palace is important for its numerous well-preserved wall paintings, which seem to date to the reigns of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BCE) and a seventh century king (Thureau-Dangin et al. 1936: 8–42, pls. XXXIX–XLII, plans B, D).

Adad-nirari III (810–783 BCE)

Aššurnaširpal II claims to have founded the Nabû temple of Kalḫu, near the southeast corner of the citadel, but the structure as excavated was built by later kings. Adad-nirari III apparently built or rebuilt the entire temple, but his work survives only in the southern half. This consisted of twin sanctuaries of Nabû and his consort Tašmetu opening off the west side of a courtyard. Opposite the shrines, on the east side of the courtyard, was a library chamber. The northern half was later rebuilt, and its layout at the time of Adad-nirari III is unknown. Adad-nirari III was also probably responsible for a major rebuilding of the “Burnt Palace” directly west of the Nabû temple, first built by a ninth century king. The excavated part of this palace was 90 by 30 meters, but it must have been larger as its south and west ends have not been excavated (Grayson 1996: 226–7; Oates 1957; Postgate and Reade 1976–80: 309–11; Oates and Oates 2001: 111–30).

At the west edge of Kalḫu citadel, four inscribed thresholds identify Adad-nirari III as the builder of a suite of rooms to the south of Aššurnaširpal's palace. These rooms were on a mud brick platform at a somewhat higher level than Aššurnaširpal's palace and were decorated with wall paintings that featured bulls and geometric and floral motifs. The large reception room in this suite was furnished with a dais and two sets of “tramlines,” evidently tracks for a wheeled brazier. The confusing plan of this suite was clarified somewhat by Iraqi excavations in 1993 (Grayson 1996: 201–3, 212–13; Turner 1970b: 198–9, pl. 43; Russell 1999: 5–6, 83–7; Kertai 2013: 14–17, pl. V; Hussein, Kertai, and Altaweel 2013: 98–104, pls. XLIII–XLIV). Adad-nirari III also built a palatial residence at the northwest corner of Kalḫu, just inside the city wall (“area PD 5”). Only a small part has been investigated and its original extent and function are unknown. Several of its rooms were decorated with geometric wall paintings (Grayson 1996: 221; Mallowan 1954: 70, 153–63).

The Nabû temple at Nineveh was located near the center of Kuyunjik, about 36 meters northwest of the Iṣtar temple. As with the Iṣtar temple, its remains were poorly preserved, but several inscriptions were recovered that give a fair idea of the history of the structure. A text of Sargon II reports that Adad-nirari

III rebuilt the temple, and inscribed bricks of Adad-nirari III confirm that he built, or rebuilt, it. This accords well with the entry in the Assyrian eponym canon for 788 BCE, “the foundations of the Nabû temple in Nineveh were laid,” suggesting that Adad-nirari III may have been the original founder of this temple. Also at Nineveh, palace bricks of Šamši-Adad V and Adad-nirari III were found in secondary context in the area of the Ištar temple. Those of Adad-nirari say that he finished the palace begun by his father (Grayson 1996: 218–21; Thompson and Hamilton 1932: 103–4; Millard 1994: 36, 58; Reade 1998–2001: 410).

Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BCE)

Tiglath-pileser III ruled from Kalḫu, where he built a new palace decorated with wall reliefs in the manner of Aššurnāṣirpal II’s palace. No identifiable architectural remains have been recovered from this palace, which Layard called the Central Palace. Tiglath-pileser III says it was on the Tigris, so Postgate and Reade suggested that it extended from the west edge of the citadel to Shalmaneser III’s bull colossi in the center of the mound. Its southern boundary is unknown. Its walls were not preserved, but many sculptured stone slabs that had been removed from the walls were found stacked in the center of the Kalḫu citadel prior to being moved to Esarhaddon’s Southwest Palace, where other reused Tiglath-pileser slabs were found already in place on the walls. Some of the reliefs have a place prepared for an inscription that was never added, suggesting that the palace was uncompleted at Tiglath-pileser’s death. According to his inscriptions, Tiglath-pileser’s was the first Assyrian palace to include a *bū hilāni* “like a Hittite palace,” an appropriation of a desirable North Syrian architectural form (Tadmor and Yamada 2011: 123; Barnett and Falkner 1962: 1–7; Postgate and Reade 1976–80: 314–15; Sobolewski 1982a: 261–73; Kertai 2013: 16–18).

At Ashur, Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II added or restored podiums in front of the main southwest and southeast entrances of the Assur temple and faced these with glazed bricks decorated with military narrative scenes. All but one of the drawings and photographs of these glazed panels were lost in World War I, but from Haller’s descriptions, it is clear that the range of subjects was the same as those for the Assyrian wall reliefs. Tiglath-pileser III also had glazed bricks made for a podium in the Adad temple, but they were used instead by Sargon II for his embellishment of the Assur temple (Andrae 1925: 21–3, figs. 4–5, pl. 6; Haller and Andrae 1955: 56–64).

In the west, Tiglath-pileser apparently restored the palace at Til-Barsip, where a number of narrative wall paintings seem to date to his reign (Thureau-Dangin et al. 1936). Tiglath-pileser was also active at the provincial town of Ḫadatu (modern Arslan Tash), some 35 km northeast of Til-Barsip, where he

built or restored the west gate, the Iṣtar temple, and possibly the palace. The architectural remains of the Iṣtar temple were badly disturbed, but included an outer gate with two inscribed basalt bulls, a shrine with two basalt lions at its entrance, and probably a number of statues of male deities. The inscription on the bulls identified this as the Iṣtar temple at Ḫadatu and named Tiglath-pileser III as its builder (Tadmor and Yamada 2011: 139–42; Thureau-Dangin et al. 1931).

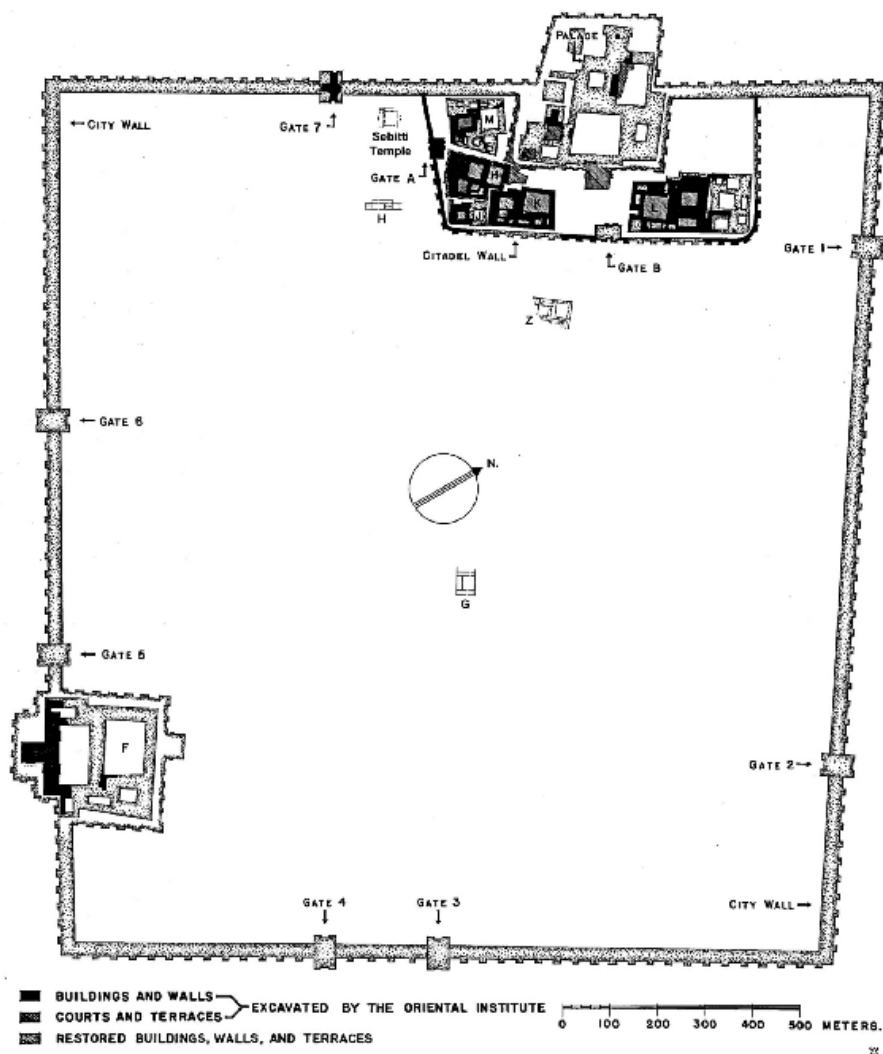
Sargon II (721–705 BCE)

Early in his reign, Sargon II reports that he restored Aššurnaširpal II's palace at Kalḫu, which he calls the "Juniper Palace," and filled it with plunder, in particular the booty from his conquest of Carchemish (Russell 1999a: 99). Sargon II or Assurbanipal rebuilt the northern half of the Nabû temple at Kalḫu. It included the entrance court, the outer gateway to which was decorated with two headless statues of fish-people (a text that may refer to this temple mentions both fish-men and fish-women, and the sex of these two cannot be determined), and a small inner court from which opened a second smaller pair of twin shrines and a reception room. The outer gateway area, including the statues of fish-people, was destroyed by ISIS with explosives in April 2016. Sargon II also probably rebuilt the "Burnt Palace" directly west of the Nabû temple. The walls of its main reception room were decorated with bands of red paint, and royal letters of Sargon II were found in this area (Oates 1957; Postgate and Reade 1976–80: 309–11, 315–16; Mallowan 1954: 81; Dalley and Postgate 1984: 159–63; Oates and Oates 2001: 124–30; Postgate 1973b: 225–6).

In his fifth year, Sargon founded a new capital city called Dur-Šarrukin ("Fortress of Sargon", modern Khorsabad) some 18 kilometers northeast of Nineveh. Sargon claimed the city was completely new, built where only farmland and a small village had been before. The city and its structures are described in a number of contemporary building accounts from Dur-Šarrukin, one of which gives an unusually complete description of the founding of the city, including the information that the owners of land appropriated for the city were either reimbursed or given comparable land outside the city walls. Sargon's reasons for choosing this location are not clear, as Dur-Šarrukin is inferior to Kalḫu and Nineveh both strategically and for ease of communication. Sargon reports that it was built in the vicinity of the springs at the foot of Mt. Muṣri, and like Aššurnaširpal, Sargon says he dug a canal to irrigate a pleasure garden, "a replica of Mt. Amanus," planted with all kinds of trees from Ḫatti. Sargon's references to the springs, canal, and pleasure garden make it clear that the plentiful supply of irrigation water was a key

advantage of this location (Fuchs 1994: 66–74, 304–7; Russell 1999a: 234–41).

Dur-Šarrukin is the most fully-excavated and most completely published late Assyrian capital. The plan of the city was roughly square, with the corners oriented toward the cardinal points (Figure 23.4). The city walls were some 7 kilometers in circuit, averaged 12 meters in height, and enclosed an area of about 275 hectares. There were seven gates in the city wall, one on the northwest side and two on each of the other three sides. The citadel, which occupied some 23 hectares, was on the northwest wall, separated from the remainder of the city by its own enclosure wall with two gates (Place and Thomas 1867–70: I, 11–18, 153–204, III, pls. 2, 8–18; Loud and Altman 1938: 18, pls. 67–70).



PLAN OF THE CITY OF DUR SHARRUKIN AFTER COMPLETION OF ORIENTAL INSTITUTE EXCAVATIONS.

Figure 23.4 Dur-Šarrukin (modern Khorsabad), city plan; adapted by the author from Loud 1938: pl. 69.

Source: Reproduced with permission of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

The largest structure in the city was the palace, straddling the city wall at the northwest side of the citadel on a terrace that measured roughly 315×195 meters and averaged 7.5 meters high (Figure 23.5). This is the only late Assyrian palace to be completely excavated. The palace plan may be divided into three major sections, each of which was built around a large courtyard. Surrounding the outer court were numerous small rooms and courts that were apparently devoted to palace administration. These rooms were either undecorated or decorated with paint. To the northwest and southwest of the throne-room court were the royal reception suites, including the principal and secondary throne rooms, and the royal apartments. This was apparently the only part of the palace in which the rooms and courtyards were decorated with wall reliefs, the subjects of which were military campaigns, banquets, hunts, processions, and apotropaic deities. Around the third court at the south corner of the palace were the palace temples, dedicated to the gods Šîn, Adad, Šamaš, Ninurta, Ea, and Ningal. Their facades were decorated with dadoes of glazed bricks painted with symbolic images. Behind the temple complex was a ziggurat, the lowest four stages of which were painted white, black, red, and blue. On a terrace just beyond the west corner of the palace was a free-standing structure (Monument x), possibly Sargon's *bīt hilāni* (Botta and Flandin 1849–50; Place and Thomas 1867–70: I, 19–151, III, pls. 3–7, 18bis–39; Loud, Frankfort, and Jacobsen 1936; Reade 2008: 13–30).

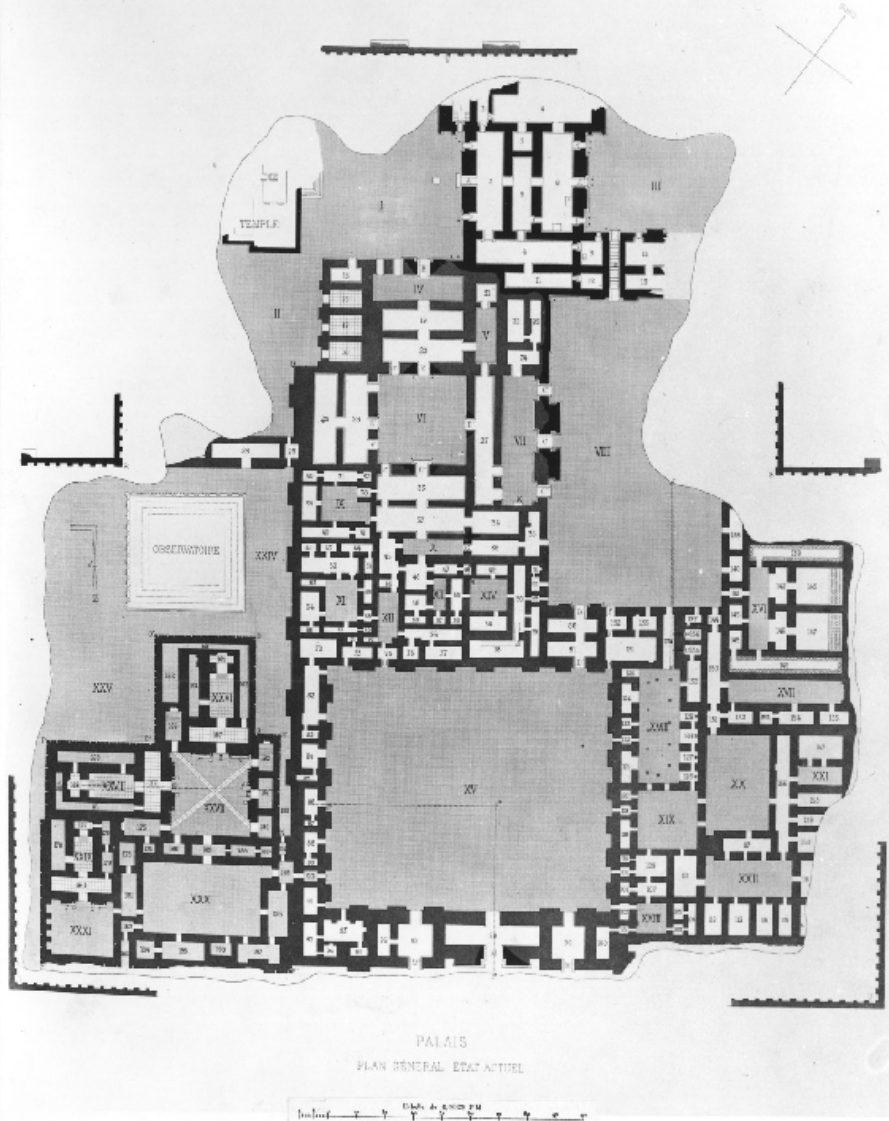


Figure 23.5 Dur-Šarrukin (modern Khorsabad), plan of the palace of Sargon II.

Source: Place 1867–70: vol. 3, pl. 3.

Five further buildings were excavated inside the citadel wall (Figure 23.6). The largest of these, at the east corner, was designated Residence L. Inscribed thresholds identified it as the residence of Sîn-aḫū-ušur, “the grand vizier, full brother of Sargon.” An outer court provided access to the throne room suite, which was decorated with wall paintings and inscribed stone thresholds, but no wall reliefs. Behind this suite was the central court, from which opened residential suites. The most unusual architectural feature of Residence L was a portico nearly 40 meters in length along the outer wall of a subsidiary

courtyard on the southeast side of the building. The function of this portico, which is unique in late Assyrian architecture, is unknown. At the southwest side of the citadel were buildings designated H, J, K, and M. Residence K had the same basic arrangement of courtyards and reception suites as L, but was somewhat smaller and simpler. Its most notable feature was a large wall painting fallen from the southwest wall of its principal reception room. Residences J and M, only partially excavated, were similar in plan to K, but smaller, and were originally decorated with wall paintings (Loud and Altman 1938: 65–72, 81–6).

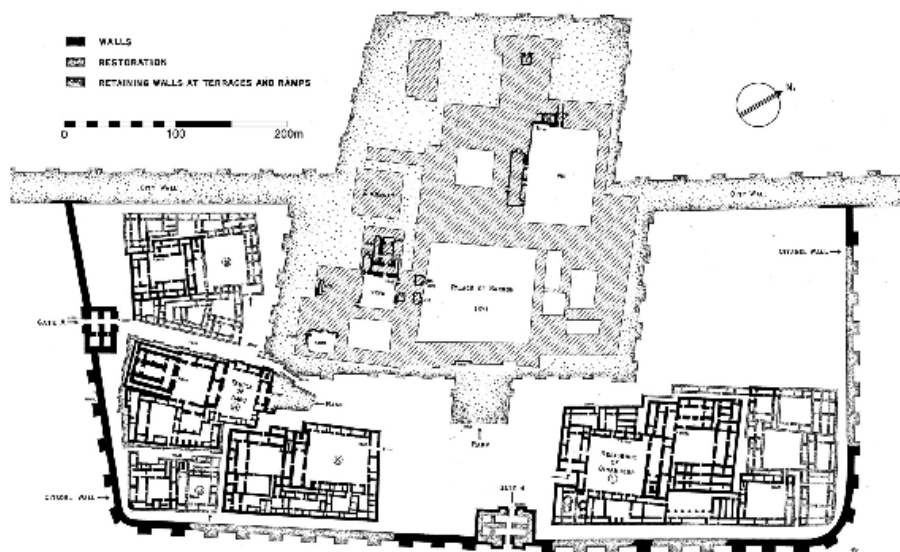


Figure 23.6 Dur-Šarrukin (modern Khorsabad), plan of the citadel.

Source: Loud 1938: pl. 70; reproduced with permission of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

Building H, the temple of Nabû, is the largest and most elaborate temple excavated at Dur-Šarrukin. Located atop a platform some three to six meters above the other buildings in the lower citadel area, it was connected directly to the palace terrace by a ramp or stairway running across an arched bridge. The shrines and associated courtyards were on the northwest side of the temple. The gate chamber, at the northeast end, opened into the outer court. On the opposite wall were two major doorways, the one on the left leading into a small shrine and that on the right, decorated with a glazed brick dado, leading into the inner court. On the far side of this court were a second pair of doors, the right again leading into a small shrine and the left, again decorated with a glazed brick dado, opening into the main shrine. Inscriptions on the thresholds and stairs of the two inner shrines identify both as being dedicated to Nabû. On the northwest sides of both courtyards were archive chambers fitted with rows of pigeonholes for tablet storage (Loud and Altman 1938: 56–64).

The largest building outside the citadel was Palace F, the arsenal, straddling the southwest stretch of the city wall. Only its southwest side has been excavated, consisting of a throne room with a pair of bull colossi in its central door and a large throne dais at its southeast end, and subsidiary reception rooms. Three large buildings in the lower town, Place's buildings G and H and Loud's building Z, were partially excavated. All were evidently major structures, comparable in scale and quality to the residences on the citadel (Loud and Altman 1938: 75–9). If there were “ordinary” dwellings at Dur-Šarrukin, none have yet been excavated. Also in the lower town, just inside the northwest city wall, a temple dedicated to the Sebetti was partially excavated by the Iraqi antiquities department. It contained fourteen inscribed stone offering tables in the cella and three tall stone incense stands in the courtyard (Safar 1957).

At Nineveh, Sargon claims to have rebuilt the Nabû temple. The excavated remains consisted of a central courtyard measuring 31 by 24 meters surrounded by a solid mud brick platform three meters thick and of an irregular trapezoidal shape, its sides varying from 46 to 58 meters. It is uncertain whether Adad-nirari III or Sargon II constructed this platform. The excavators were unable to trace any wall remains, but did identify four doorways, one on each side, the best preserved of which was on the northeast side (Thompson and Hutchinson 1929a; Thompson and Hamilton 1932: 103–4; Reade 1998–2001: 410).

Sennacherib (704–681 BCE)

Immediately following his accession to the throne, Sennacherib began rebuilding Nineveh on a grand scale with a new city wall, a huge new palace, an arsenal, temples, roads, bridges, and canals ([Figure 23.7](#)). He enclosed the city with a wall roughly 12 kilometers in circuit, encompassing an area of some 750 hectares. Kuyunjik and Nebi Yunus were incorporated into the western stretch of the wall as the sites for the palace and arsenal respectively. The wall, which is still clearly visible around most of the city, was built in two levels, with a lower outer part, of mud brick faced with ashlar limestone topped with crenellations, projecting from a higher inner part of mud brick. Its total thickness was about 25 meters (Reade 1998–2001: 397–401).

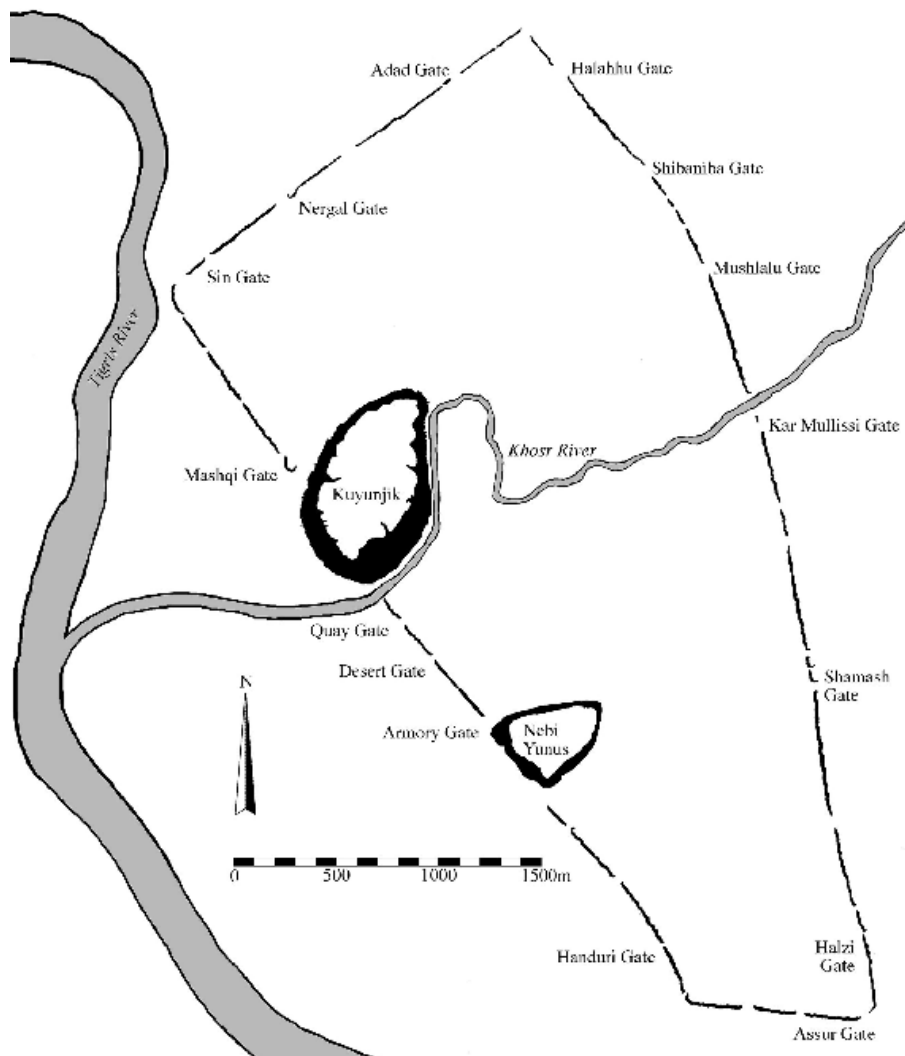


Figure 23.7 Nineveh, city plan, time of Sennacherib.

Source: author.

Gates were located on the lines of principal roads or to provide access to major structures inside and outside the walls. According to Sennacherib's texts, the city wall was pierced by fourteen, fifteen, or eighteen gates, the number increasing from the earlier to the later texts. Most of these are still visible as large mounds projecting above and beyond the wall, and nine have been at least partially excavated. Only one – the Nergal gate on the north wall, where a well-preserved Sennacherib human-headed bull colossus was until recently still to be seen – is known to have been decorated with sculptures. Excavations at the Adad gate on the north wall and Halzi gate at the southeast corner revealed architectural alterations and human skeletons from the period of the final defense and fall of Nineveh (Grayson and Novotny 2012;

Suleiman 1971b; Stronach 1997; Reade 1998–2001: 401–3). The restored Nergal, Adad, and Maški gates were completely demolished by ISIS from April to June 2016.

The challenge of ensuring an adequate supply of irrigation water was met through an aggressive program of canal construction that continued throughout the king's reign. Sennacherib's texts describe in detail the water system he built for Nineveh, and parts of it have been identified to the north of the city. Two dams on the Khosr river – at al-Jileh and Shallalat, respectively some three and 13 kilometers upstream from Kuyunjik – probably belong to Sennacherib's water system. The canal head near Bavian and the spectacular aqueduct at Jerwan both definitely belong to one of his canals, and the rock reliefs at Faida and Maltai, both attributed to Sennacherib, probably mark the courses of others (Grayson and Novotny 2012; Jacobsen and Lloyd 1935; Reade 1978; Reade 1998–2001: 404–7; Ur 2005).

Sennacherib's new palace, called the Southwest Palace by its excavator, was built in the oldest part of the city, along the southwest side of the large citadel mound of Kuyunjik, overlooking the junction of the Tigris and Khosr rivers (Figure 21.2). According to Sennacherib's texts, his new "Palace Without Rival" was on the site of an old one, probably the Middle Assyrian palace. He demolished the old building and enlarged its site by constructing a new terrace 914 by 440 cubits (about 500 by 240 meters) in extent. The state apartments at the southwest end of the palace cover an area about 200 meters square and comprise some seventy rooms. The excavated area included a traditional throne-room suite with its inner court and subsidiary reception suites, restored as a site museum by the Iraq State Organization for Antiquities and Heritage in the 1960s and demolished by ISIS in April–May 2016. The plan of the remainder of the state apartments is novel, with a second inner court, also surrounded by reception suites, and a group of rooms of uncertain plan facing the southwest terrace. In the western part of the excavated area was a reception suite with an inscribed pair of colossi that identify it as the residence of Sennacherib's favorite queen. The rooms in or around major reception suites were decorated with wall reliefs, the subject of which was overwhelmingly scenes of conquest (Grayson and Novotny 2012; Layard 1849a and 1853a; Russell 1991 and 1998a; Reade 1998–2001: 411–16; Turner 2001 and 2003).

It is clear from Sennacherib's description of his palace that less than half of it has been excavated. Roughly 300 meters northeast of the state apartments is the so-called Eastern Building. Inscribed bull colossi in this structure identify it as part of Sennacherib's palace and it is about where the end of the main palace should be according to Sennacherib's own accounts. King also reported scattered traces of Sennacherib construction in the area between the state apartments and the Eastern Building, and these must belong to the palace as well (Russell 1991: 78–88; Russell 1997: 299–301; Thompson and

On Nebi Yunus, Sennacherib rebuilt the back palace or arsenal, which he says had been built by his ancestors and had fallen into disrepair. Sennacherib reports that he demolished the old structure and erected a much larger one, decorated with human-headed bull gateway colossi of stone and statues of protective deities in bronze. Excavations at the east end of the mound by Mohammed Ali Mustafa exposed a monumental gateway and a number of inscribed bricks of Sennacherib, while construction work at the northwest corner revealed a row of relief slabs carved with a procession of grooms leading horses such as were also found in a descending passage on the west side of Sennacherib's palace on Kuyunjik. These are presumably parts of the arsenal, the plan of which, however, is still very incomplete (Grayson and Novotny 2012; Turner 1970b; Scott and MacGinnis 1990, 72, pl. 13b).

Sennacherib also rebuilt the Nergal temple at Tarbišu (modern Sherif Khan), about five kilometers north of Nineveh. The western part of this temple consisted of inner and outer courtyards, each surrounded by a single rank of small rooms. At the south side of the inner courtyard were the entrances to two shrines, the one at the east larger than that at the west. Both had the typical late Assyrian layout of a broad antechamber and long cult chamber (Suleiman 1971a; Miglus 2011–13).

Sennacherib was one of the most active builders in Ashur during the Neo-Assyrian period. Andrae attributed a massive semicircular stone bastion in front of the west gate to Sennacherib on the basis of the stonework. A text dating to Sennacherib's reign lists thirteen city gates, though some of these may be two names for what is essentially the same gate (Andrae 1913: 51, Abb. 58, 68; George 1992: 177). Sennacherib was also responsible for the last major alteration to the Assur temple. At the north end of the southeast wall of the main temple block, directly opposite the end of the cella, he constructed a new court and entrance to the temple, thereby placing the entrance on the main axis of the cella (Haller and Andrae 1955: 69–73; Galter 1984).

Following his conquest and destruction of Babylon, Sennacherib built a new *akītu*-festival temple outside the wall some 200 meters northwest of the city. His texts that commemorate the event say that after it was completed, a part of this new temple was destroyed by fire and he rebuilt it. The excavators distinguished two phases of the building, both of which were the work of Sennacherib. The earlier phase, which presumably predates the fire, measured 55 × 60 meters and the later, which was built largely on the foundations of the earlier, measured 67 × 60 meters. Sennacherib says that the entire building was constructed of limestone, a very unusual building practice in Assyria. The plans of the two phases were quite similar. Both were built around a large central court with the entrance on one end and a wide cella opening off the other. The side walls seem to have been screened by shallow porticoes, or perhaps these “pillars” were actually pedestals for statues (Haller and Andrae

Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE)

Esarhaddon carried out construction projects in all of Assyria's traditional capitals, and focused more on renovating existing structures, rather than building new ones. At Nineveh, Esarhaddon says that he greatly enlarged the arsenal and decorated it with sculptures representing his victories over hostile regions, presumably referring to wall reliefs. These sculptures, if they were ever completed, have not yet been excavated. Excavations in 1990 by the Iraq State Organization for Antiquities and Heritage in a large courtyard of the arsenal exposed a monumental entrance facade decorated with bull colossi, beyond which is a large room—perhaps a throne room—paneled with stone slabs, apparently unsculptured. The facade is decorated with a pair of addorsed bull colossi with a lion-clutching human in between and several doorways lined with bull colossi (Leichty 2011: 22–6, 33–5, 39–41; Musa 1987–88; Scott and MacGinnis 1990: 71, pl. XIIIa; Reade 1998–2001: 419–20).

Esarhaddon rebuilt the palace at Tarbiṣu as a residence for the crown prince. The palace plan combines traditional and novel features. The best-preserved block of rooms consists of a courtyard with reception suites of typical late Assyrian plan on its east and west sides. On its south side, however, was the unusual feature of a broad stone staircase that led up to a columned porch or vestibule. This, the only unequivocal example of a North Syrian *bīt hilāni* to have been excavated in an Assyrian palace, seems to have functioned as a sort of grand entrance for a third reception suite, located directly behind the porch. An Esarhaddon foundation cylinder reports that the palace was intended for the crown prince, Assurbanipal (Leichty 2011: 176–7; Suleiman 1971a; Miglus 2011–13).

At Kalḫu, Esarhaddon restored the arsenal and built a heavily-fortified stone postern gate and retaining wall, much of it still well-preserved, at its southwest corner. Inscriptions by the gate report that this wall and the terrace it supports are the foundation of Esarhaddon's new residence in the arsenal. Atop this wall was a group of rooms, which must be this new residence (Leichty 2011: 164–5; Mallowan 1966: II, 464–8; Russell 1999a: 146–9). Also at Kalḫu, Esarhaddon built a palace – Layard's Southwest Palace – at the southwest corner of the citadel. Only a single group of rooms, covering an area of some 60 by 35 meters, was fully excavated. Their plan, as reconstructed by Turner, is atypical, consisting of two parallel long rooms with column bases in their side and end doorways, and beyond and parallel to these, a row of smaller rooms, the central of which seems to be the focus of the suite. The function of this suite is unknown. The excavated part of the

palace also included three monumental portals decorated with human-headed winged lions and bulls (Barnett and Falkner 1962: 20–3; Turner 1970b: 201–2, pl. XLVd; Postgate and Reade 1976–80: 315).

Assurbanipal (668–627 BCE)

Assurbanipal focused his attention on Nineveh, apparently living for a time in Sennacherib's palace, which he refurbished, decorating at least one room with his own wall reliefs (Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998: 94–100).

Assurbanipal's major project at Nineveh, however, was the reconstruction of the crown prince's palace, called the North Palace by its excavators, to the north of the Nabû temple on Kuyunjik. An area of some 135 by 120 meters was partially excavated, but this was only the central part of the palace, including an outer court, throne-room suite, inner court with part of a typical reception suite on its northwest side, and a system of hallways that communicated with the outside. The rooms were decorated with wall reliefs that are among the finest surviving examples of Assyrian sculpture, including the famous lion hunts (Barnett 1976).

In a foundation prism dated 649 BCE, Assurbanipal claims, like his father and grandfather, to have restored the Nineveh arsenal. In the course of excavations on the arsenal by the Iraq State Organization for Antiquities and Heritage, at least one wall slab with an Assurbanipal inscription on its back was discovered. Assurbanipal also worked on the major sanctuaries of Nineveh. He embellished the Ištar temple with gold and silver, enlarged the temple courtyard and repaved it with limestone slabs, restored the *akītu*-festival temple of Ištar and decorated it with glazed bricks representing his triumphs over his enemies, and worked on the ziggurat. He also says that he decorated the Nabû temple with silver and gold, and enlarged its courtyard and paved it with stone. His pavement slabs were found outside both temples (Borger and Fuchs 1996: 206, 252, 254–5, 268–70, 291, 295; Russell 1999a: 154; Reade 2005: 381–2).

At Kalḫu, Assurbanipal may have been the builder of the Town Wall Palace, a building measuring some 110 by 60 meters just inside the south city wall between the arsenal and the citadel. The excavated portion consisted of an inner court surrounded by a principal reception suite, small residential rooms, and an unusual suite of three large parallel rooms. The principal reception suite had a similar plan to the throne-room suite in Assurbanipal's North Palace, which supports Mallowan's attribution of the structure to that king or one of his successors (Mallowan 1957: 21–5, pls. X–XI; Postgate and Reade 1976–80: 319–20; Oates and Oates 2001: 141–3).

Sîn-šarru-iškun (627–612 BCE)

Sîn-šarru-iškun undertook the last great Assyrian construction project, a new temple for Nabû built on the site of Tukulti-Ninurta I's Ištar temple at Ashur. Sîn-šarru-iškun leveled Tukulti-Ninurta's structure, which was still standing and had evidently been rededicated to Nabû, and built a completely new Nabû temple on the site. This temple measured 68.5 × 55 meters and was planned around two courts. The twin shrines of Nabû and Tašmetu opened off of one court and a single shrine, perhaps a bedroom for the divine couple, opened off the other. The Nabû temple was built against Aššur-reša-iši I's temple of Ištar of Ashur without encroaching on it. Sîn-šarru-iškun says that when his new temple was completed, Nabû and Tašmetu were moved into it from the Ištar temple, which must, therefore, still have been active at that time (Böhl 1936: 95–106, 137–8; Andrae 1935: 119–29; Schmitt 2012: 82–100).

References

References are found at the end of the following chapter.

Further Readings

The best general survey of the excavations at Ashur is still Andrae (1977), supplemented more recently by a volume of studies on individual structures and subjects edited by Marzahn and Salje (2003). Layard's (1849a, 1853a) accounts of the discovery of Kalḫu and Nineveh still make fascinating reading, as does Mallowan's (1966) account of his excavations at Kalḫu. More recent overall surveys of Kalḫu are Postgate and Reade (1976–80) and Oates and Oates (2001), with Reade (2002a) and Curtis et al. (2008) giving more detailed studies of specific buildings and groups of objects. Of these, Oates and Oates (2001) and Curtis et al. (2008) are available for free download from the website of the British Institute for the Study of Iraq (<http://www.bisi.ac.uk>). For Nineveh, the most comprehensive overview of the architecture is Reade 1998–2001, while Russell 1991 and Reade 2005 provide detailed studies of two major buildings. For Dur-Šarrukīn, the original reports by Botta and Flandin (1849–50) and Place and Thomas (1867–70) are models for their day, though difficult to find today. The reports of the Chicago excavations (Loud et al. 1936, Loud and Altman 1938) are available for free download from the website of the Oriental Institute (<https://oi.uchicago.edu/research/pubs/catalog/oip/>). A more recent volume of individual studies edited by Caubet (1995) is also valuable. Kertai and Miglus (2013) present excellent recent studies of a number of Neo-Assyrian palaces.

CHAPTER 24

Assyrian Art

John M. Russell

Introduction

This chapter focuses on sculpture, painting, and portable arts made primarily for Assyrian patrons and used in centers of Assyrian culture. This is restricted to the city of Ashur in the third millennium, with the addition of Kaniš, Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta, and Nineveh in the second millennium, plus Kalḫu, Dur-Šarrukin, and provincial cities in the first. Due to space limitations, objects that exemplify regional styles – such as Anatolian and Old Syrian style seals and Syrian ivory carvings – are excluded here, even though they were used by Assyrians. Also due to space limitations, it has been possible to illustrate only a small selection of objects here. For convenient illustrations of many of the Old and Middle Assyrian works discussed, the reader is encouraged to consult Harper et al. (1995; see “Further Readings” below).

Ashur in the Third Millennium BCE

A considerable number of broken stone sculptures were found in the destruction debris of Iṣtar temple levels G and GF. The oldest of these stylistically is a fragmentary conical stone vessel carved with figures in high relief, found at the south end of the cella. Around its top are three lions with space for a missing fourth, and below are a nude male between two bulls on one side and a bull attacking a lion on the other. Comparable vessels from other sites are usually dated to the Jamdat Nasr period (ca. 3100–2900 BCE), meaning that this object was already very old when level G was destroyed (Andrae 1922: 81–2, Taf. 50a–e; Harper, in Harper et al. 1995: 27–8; Bär 2003a: 149–50, 319, Taf. 51–2).

The majority of the stone sculptures from Iṣtar temple level G are human figures similar in style to examples from Mari, the Diyala, and southern Mesopotamia that generally seem to date to the Early Dynastic IIIB period (ca. 2500–2334 BCE). The Ashur examples are well under life size and include male and female figures, both seated and standing, and range in appearance from strikingly naturalistic to highly stylized. Many are shown wearing a garment covered with rows of stylized tufts of wool. None were

inscribed. Most were found either in the cella or in the courtyard just beyond the cella door, leading Andrae to propose that they had originally stood in the cella as votive figures, possibly placed on the mud brick benches that ran along the base of the long walls (Andrae 1922: 58–80, Taf. 30–48; Harper, in Harper et al. 1995: 28–31; Bär 2003a: 84–96, 317–18, Taf. 1–35). Andrae stated that a similar figure of a seated female was found in the Assur temple, but he gave no information on its archaeological context. He observed that this statue had been extensively repaired in antiquity, suggesting a long period of use (Assur Nr. S 16710; Andrae 1922: 76, Taf. 40).

One complete stone statue and several fragmentary examples probably date to the late third millennium. A headless but otherwise well-preserved life-size diorite statue of a man was found in secondary context in the vicinity of the Anu-Adad temple in 1905 and its head was excavated in 1982 in the area of the Assur temple ([Figure 24.1](#)). Although the head is in Baghdad and the body in Berlin, the two have been reunited digitally to give an impression of the whole. The figure wears a wide headband with long hair bound at the back of his head. A long beard hangs over his chest in curly locks. His torso is bare with prominent musculature and hands clasped in front of the waist. He wears a necklace and a long smooth skirt supported by a wide belt at the waist. The figure is usually dated to the Akkadian period (2334–2154 BCE) on the basis of the slender build, powerful musculature, and similarities of the hair and beard to the Akkadian copper head from Nineveh. The Ashur head, however, is much less naturalistic than the Nineveh example, suggesting that it is a provincial work inspired by an Akkadian model (VA Ass 2147; Andrae 1909: 28; Klengel-Brandt, in Harper et al. 1995: 42–3, pl. 4; Klengel-Brandt 2003: Abb. 6).



Figure 24.1 Ashur, statue of a ruler, digital reconstruction, probably Akkadian Period, diorite, total H. ca. 1.70 m; body in Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum, VA Ass 2147, head in Baghdad, Iraq Museum,

Ehrenberg proposed that this statue represents an Old Assyrian king, perhaps Sargon I or Naram-Sîn, who would be expressing his independence from Ur III rule by invoking a pre-Ur III style. Against this, however, Eppihimer observed that the labeled Old Assyrian statue of Erišum I and the seals of Sargon I and Naram-Sîn are firmly in the Ur III tradition, indicating that the Old Assyrian kings were not seeking a visual break with their Ur III predecessors (Ehrenberg 1997; Eppihimer 2009: 186–90). A fragmentary diorite life-size male torso in the same pose is even more naturalistic and muscular, and this, together with diorite muscular arm fragments from two further statues, presumably dates to the Akkadian period as well (Andrae 1977: 127–9, figs. 106–10; Moortgat 1969: pl. 143).

A beautifully modeled small-scale head of a woman was found 60 cm above the floor of the cella in the destruction debris of Ištar temple level GF. The fringe of hair that extends below her elaborate head covering was originally inlaid, as were her eyes and eyebrows. Andrae believed that fragments of the feet and body of a standing statue found nearby belonged to the same statue as the head, but Bär argued these were from a male figure. The body fragments were clothed in a garment with horizontal, vertical, and diagonal fringes. This garment and the naturalistic modeling of the female head suggest a date in the Akkadian or Ur III period (2112–2004 BCE), which would be consistent with their find spots near the foundation level of Ištar temple level E, built during the Ur III period (Andrae 1922: 68–71, Taf. 28, 38–9; Harper, in Harper et al. 1995: 31–3, pl. 2; Bär 2003a: 96–9, 318, Taf. 10, 31–2). A headless half-life-size statue of a man was found in secondary context standing against the outer wall of the Ištar temple of Tukulti-Ninurta I. The pose and long garment of this standing figure are very similar to Ur III statues of Gudea, except that this figure was bearded and the fringes of his garment are shown as tassels. This figure also may originally have been associated with Ištar temple level E, and may represent the Ur III governor Zarriqum, who apparently built level E (Ass. 20070; Andrae 1922: 108–10, Taf. 63).

Two copper-alloy statuettes (H: ca. 20 cm) of a male offering bearer carrying an animal were found in a cache of copper-alloy votive objects buried in a jar in the earliest level of the Assur temple, in the area that would later be the sanctuary. The figures are best appreciated in photos taken prior to cleaning, since much detail was lost during the restoration process (Haller and Andrae 1955: 12, pl. 26). The figures are more slender than contemporary stone counterparts, and because metal is less brittle than stone, the arms and legs are fully modeled and extend unsupported beyond the body. Based on the date of other objects in the cache and comparisons with other sculptures, Wartke dated these statuettes to the last quarter of the third millennium (Wartke, in Harper et al. 1995: 37–41, pl. 3).

The most complete publication of cylinder seals excavated at Ashur is still Moortgat's *Vorderasiatische Rollsiegel* (1940, unrevised 2nd edition 1966), which catalogs seals in the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin. The Ashur seals are of great interest since, as an excavated corpus, they display a much wider range of artistic quality than is typically found in seals collected from the market. Indeed, the carving on some of the Ashur seals is so schematic that it can be difficult to identify their subject or period. As with the sculpture, third millennium cylinder seals from Ashur are similar to examples from southern Iraq, the Diyala, Mari, and southwest Iran, indicating that the city was part of the broad Mesopotamian trade system.

The earliest examples are a Jamdat Nasr (ca. 3100–2900 BCE) seal with stylized animals and an Early Dynastic I (ca. 2900–2750 BCE) seal with a geometric pattern (Moortgat 1966: nos. 22, 50). Somewhat later are three seals with contest scenes that date stylistically to the late Early Dynastic I/II (ca. 2750–2600 BCE), and two with banquet scenes from the Early Dynastic IIIa (ca. 2600–2500 BCE; Moortgat 1966: nos. 77, 98, 109, 142, 143). Five further seals seem to date to the Early Dynastic period on the basis of their subjects, but are so crudely carved that it is difficult to determine a more precise date on the basis of style. Two of these are of baked clay with linear figures, similar to examples from Early Dynastic contexts in the Diyala and Susa, suggesting that Ashur participated in the eastern Mesopotamian cultural sphere (Moortgat 1966: no. 131, 777–8; Bär 2003a: Taf. 43, S3, S4, S21; al-Gailani Werr 1988: 2–3, no. 11). Two slightly later seals from the Early Dynastic-Akkadian transitional period likewise seem to represent peripheral styles (Moortgat 1966: no. 106; Bär 2003a: Taf. 44, S24, S25).

In comparison with the Early Dynastic seals, the excavated Akkadian (2334–2154 BCE) style seals from Ashur are better carved and exhibit less stylistic variability. Their imagery is typical for Akkadian seals in the south, including contests, worship scenes, and mythological subjects, including the unusual subject of three gods(?) hunting from a boat in a marsh (Moortgat 1966: nos. 162, 189, 195, 203, 221, 242, 248; Bär 2003a: Taf. 43, S2; Hockman 2010: pl. 67). In addition to actual seals, two fragmentary clay sealings (ancient impressions) apparently in Akkadian style were found in the fill above the floor in the main courtyard of Ištar temple level E (Bär 2003a: Taf. 46, 147, S10, S11). While ancient impressions on clay constitute critical primary evidence for sealing motifs and practices, it is important to note that they differ from modern impressions in plasticine in that they are less distinct and often show only a part of the scene. They are often published as composite drawings reconstructed from several impressions of the same seal, and since the artists who make these drawings have their own individual styles, drawings by two different artists of the same seal impression may look quite different.

Three seals and eleven clay sealings from Ashur depict variations of the

presentation scene typical of Ur III (2112–2004 BCE) and Isin-Larsa (2003–1793 BCE) seals. The three seals all show a male worshipper and intercessor female deity standing before a seated god or deified king, with filling motifs in the two Isin-Larsa examples (Moortgat 1966: nos. 250, 296, 309; Bär 2003a: Taf. 44, S 22). The eleven sealings preserve impressions from nine different seals with Ur III/Isin-Larsa presentation scenes (Bär 2003a: Taf. 45-9, 147, S5, S7, S8, S9, S12, S13, S14, S15, S17, S18). One of these sealings can be dated very early in the Isin-Larsa period on the basis of its inscription, which states that it belonged to an official of Iši-Dagan, viceroy (*šakkanakku*) of Mari. Durand demonstrated that Iši-Dagan's reign began in 2007 BCE or soon thereafter, and the archaeological context of this sealing in level E likewise supports a date around the turn of the second millennium (Bär 2003a: Taf. 45, S6; Durand 1985: 149–50, 155). The seal shows evidence of recarving, which suggests that it was brought to Ashur as a valuable object in its own right and was then recut in accordance with local preference.

The clay sealings all come from the fill above the floor in the main courtyard of Ištar temple level E. The use patterns on the backs of these sealings give some clues to the functions they served in their temple context. Three were flat with a pronounced projecting ridge, indicating that the sealings had been pressed over a crack between two surfaces, such as a box lid or closed door. The backs of two others were molded to the shape of the neck and rim of a jar, and one of these also had the impressions of the textile and cord that were on the jar. The reverse sides of five more had impressions from one or more cords. These distinctive and often inscribed sealings on vessels, boxes, baskets, and doors provide some of the best evidence for the practical functioning of the temple administration (Bär 2003a: 130, 135–40, Taf. 45–9).

According to his Ištar temple text, Zarriqum, governor or king of Ashur during the later Ur III period, built the Ištar temple during the reign of Amar-Suen (2046–2038 BCE; Grayson 1987: 9; Michalowski 2009). The archaeological evidence suggests that this was Ištar temple level E, which therefore would have been in use from the time of Amar-Suen until it was rebuilt by the Old Assyrian king Ilušuma (died 1974 BCE), a period of at most seventy-three years, and probably less. This is the period during which these sealings were discarded in the fill of level E, and it is presumably the period during which the seals that made those impressions were in use.

The Old Assyrian Period

The first Assyrian Kings (ca. 2040–1809 BCE)

In the Assyrian King List six kings precede the Old Assyrian king Erišum I (1974–1935 BCE), the first king whose regnal dates are known. The last three of these kings – Puzur-Aššur I, Šalim-ahum, and Ilušuma – are also attested in Old Assyrian royal genealogies. Two others, Sulili/Šilulu and Kikkiya, are also known from other sources and probably ruled at this time as well, while the sixth, Akiya, is otherwise unattested (Larsen 1976: 34–40; dates according to [Chapter 3](#) of this volume, for slightly different dates cf. Barjamovic et al. 2012: 1–40). This seems to be plenty of kings for the span of some sixty-four years between the death of Amar-Suen and the accession of Erišum I, which suggests that Assyria began to be ruled by local kings soon after the time of Zarriqum. The implication of this is that the Ur III level E temple at Ashur actually functioned under a native Old Assyrian administration for most of its existence, and this administration continued to use seals in the prevailing Ur III and Isin-Larsa styles. This provides a context for the origin of the local Old Assyrian style.

An under life size seated statue that apparently represents Erišum I was found near the southern entrance of the great southeast courtyard of the Assur temple. The figure is of alabaster, which was heavily eroded, and the head is missing. The right side of the seat carries a fragmentary inscription stating that the sitter, whose name is damaged, “built the temple for Assur, his lord.” According to Grayson, the text was collated and with “reasonable certainty” belongs to Erišum I, which would be consistent with Erišum’s other texts describing his work on the Assur temple. Andrae described the statue’s style as similar to that of the seated Gudea statues from Telloh, namely Ur III, and a poor photograph of the piece seems to support the Ur III attribution (VA Ass 2260; Andrae 1904: 30–1; Grayson 1987: 34–5; Bär 2003c: 116, Abb. 6; Eppihimer 2009: 183–4).

Apart from this statue and possibly some of the uninscribed statues already described, the only art that survives from the Old Assyrian period is seals and their impressions. Although few Old Assyrian seals and only one impression have been published from Ashur itself, a vast number of impressions were preserved on documents belonging to Assyrian merchants living in the trading colony at Kaniš. The corpus includes impressions from the seals of five Old Assyrian kings. The earliest, impressed on a number of tablets from Kaniš, is inscribed with a seven-line text that covers most of the surface of the seal: “Assur is king, Šilulu, viceroy (ENSI) of Assur, son of Dakiki, herald (NIMGIR) of the city Ashur, [his servant]” (adapted from Grayson 1987: 13). The remainder of the seal is carved with an image of a triumphant bearded male figure facing left, wearing a rounded cap and short kilt with diagonal lower hem, carrying a scimitar in his right hand and an oxhide shield and spear in his left, and with his raised left foot planted on the prone body of a defeated enemy. The field in front of him is carved with a sun disk nested in a moon crescent, an unidentifiable quadruped, a disembodied human head, and

a star (Özgüç and Tunca 2001: pl. 54).

The pose of the main figure ultimately derives from that of the victorious king in the stele of the Akkadian king Naram-Sîn, but Eppihimer observed that the motif reappeared in the Ur III period in a now-lost image of king Šu-Sîn (2037–2029 BCE) and in a representation of the god Tišpak on a seal of Šu-iliya, king of Ešnunna (ca. 2026–2010 BCE; Eppihimer 2013: 42, fig. 8; Frayne 1997: 311). The closest surviving visual parallel for this figure is on an unprovenanced late Ur III or Isin-Larsa seal where a kilt-clad triumphant king with left foot raised atop a defeated foe appears beside a royal introduction scene (Moortgat 1966: 110, no. 292). The subject of the Šilulu seal, therefore, is attested around the turn of the second millennium, and the filling motifs point to the Isin-Larsa style.

Who is this Šilulu, viceroy of Assur? The documents on which the seal was impressed belong to a later owner, the Assyrian merchant Šilulu, son of Uku, who was active in the first half of the 19th century BCE during the reigns of the late Old Assyrian kings Sargon I to Naram-Sîn (Lassen 2012: 164–7). This Šilulu was using a distinguished namesake's seal, which he altered by erasing the final line of the inscription ("his servant," perhaps together with another personal name), and conceivably by adding filling motifs to bring the seal up to date. Since the Old Assyrian royal dynastic sequence is well-documented from Puzur-Aššur I (ca. 2000 BCE) onward, the seal's original owner must have ruled in the short period between Zarriqum and Puzur-Aššur I. Rather than adding another ruler to the three already known from the Assyrian King List for this period, Šilulu is usually identified with the king list's similar-sounding Sulili, making him the first independent ruler of Old Assyrian Ashur (Lassen 2012: 164–167; Eppihimer 2013: 42). This is consistent with the genealogy in the seal's inscription, where Šilulu does not claim royal ancestry. The identification of Šilulu as the first Old Assyrian king would also provide a context for another noteworthy feature of his seal inscription: in contrast to the groveling praise of a foreign king in Zarriqum's Ištar temple text, Šilulu, for the first time, triumphantly proclaims, "Assur is king!" The figure on the seal, whether it represents the god or his viceroy, embodies this triumph.

The Old Assyrian royal seals have been thoroughly studied by Lassen (2012: 210–23) and Eppihimer (2013), and only the main points will be summarized here. Impressions survive from four seals of three kings of the Old Assyrian dynasty: two different seals of Erišum I (1972–1933 BCE), and one seal each of Sargon I (1917–1878 BCE; [Figure 3.3a](#)) and Naram-Sîn (1869–ca. 1836 BCE). All four seals show the same subject, a royal introduction scene. The principal male figure faces left, holding a cup in his raised right hand, wearing a flounced garment and plain rounded cap, seated on a cushioned stool. Behind him stands a suppliant goddess with horned crown, flounced garment, and upraised arms. He is approached from the left by another goddess,

similarly dressed, leading by the hand a male figure in a long plain garment that exposes the forward leg, and who is either bald or wears a tight rounded cap. A sun disk nested in a moon crescent is between the seated and leading figures, and in three of the seals there is a crescent between the leading goddess and worshipper. Behind the worshipper is a six-line inscription that reads “RN, viceroy of Assur, son of RN, viceroy of Assur.”

At first glance, this seems to be a straightforward Ur III introduction scene showing an official being presented to the king, but Lassen and Eppihimer both observe that the presence of a suppliant goddess behind a seated king is exceedingly rare in both Ur III and Old Assyrian glyptic (Lassen 2012: 216; Eppihimer 2013: 40). This suggests either that Erišum reused or copied a very rare Ur III seal, or that he added the suppliant goddess to an otherwise common scene. Either way, considering the abundance of Ur III seals with the standard composition available to him, his choice of this distinctive composition must have been deliberate (Eppihimer 2013: 42–3).

The suppliant goddess may also be a clue to another puzzle posed by these seals: who are the male figures? They look like a seated Ur III king and standing official, so the natural assumption would be that the seated figure is the Assyrian ruler. However, the inscriptions on Ur III presentation scenes typically name both the king and the standing official, but the only names here are Assur and his viceroy, leaving the identity and purpose of the standing figure a mystery. Another possibility is that the seated figure is the god Assur, the true king of Ashur, depicted here as a king without obvious divine attributes (unless the suppliant goddess is his attribute). The standing figure would then be his human viceroy. The problem with this, of course, is that gods typically are depicted with divine attributes precisely to distinguish them from humans. A third possibility, Lassen suggests, is that the Old Assyrian kings saw the royal presentation scene as a time-honored expression of power relationships, employing it as a symbol rather than a narrative (Lassen 2012: 217–20; Eppihimer 2013: 43–5).

Though the subjects of all four royal seals are identical, their styles are different. The figures in both of Erišum’s seals are carved in the modeled, relatively naturalistic Isin-Larsa style. Those in the seals of Sargon I and Naram-Sîn, however, have angular limbs and faces, and hands shaped like dinner forks. These are some of the characteristics that distinguish the local Old Assyrian style from the Isin-Larsa. By far the largest corpus of Old Assyrian seal impressions come from Kaniš level II – Teissier’s indispensable catalog provides drawings of impressions from 277 Kaniš seals in this style (Teissier 1994: 212–23).

Lassen (2012) has recently carried out a groundbreaking analysis of the styles, ownership, and dating of these seals, and a few of her principal findings are summarized here. She observed that a number of the Old Assyrian seals can be grouped into two major sub-styles. The first, which she termed OA 1, is

characterized by elongated figures with angular, linear features and the usual fork-like hands. Their subject is royal presentation scenes derived from the Ur III tradition, but unlike Ur III seals, at Kaniš a goddess always stands between the worshipper and the seated figure, even if she is not leading him by the hand. These seals always have filling motifs, and to the usual Isin-Larsa repertoire is added a small rectangular altar in the shape of a bull, usually with a cone on its back, which often replaces the disk and crescent in front of the face of the seated figure. The compositions stick to the ground line and do not incorporate motifs from Syria or Anatolia.

More than half of the OA 1 seals have inscriptions that identify the owners. Based on these inscriptions and on the content of the sealed documents, Lassen determined that OA 1 seals were always owned by Assyrians, and of the more than 40 owners who can be identified, all but one were men. Many of these owners had high social status, and some were first-generation traders. Based on sealed eponym-dated texts, Lassen showed that OA 1 was the only Old Assyrian seal style in use at Kaniš during the initial phase of the trade, from the reign of Erišum I to midway through the reign of Sargon I, after which it began to be replaced by other Old Assyrian types. Because the OA 1 seals are associated with Assyrians in the early stage of the trade and lack foreign motifs, Lassen suggests either that they were brought from Ashur by their owners, or carved by Assyrian seal cutters at Kaniš (Lassen 2012: 48–9, 57–63, 88, 164–80; 2014).

One of the most interesting features of the OA 1 seals is the introduction of the bull altar. This motif has sometimes been assumed to have been borrowed from Anatolia, but Lassen demonstrates that its earliest attested occurrences are in OA 1 seals, thirty-five years before it began to appear in Anatolian seals. This points to the bull altar being an Assyrian invention. She suggests that it may be a visual symbol of Assur or his temple, observing that when Erišum I rebuilt the Assur temple, he named it “Wild Bull.” Furthermore, the Old Assyrian king Ilušuma’s identification of the city of Ashur with Mount Abih suggests that the cone atop the bull altar may refer to the god as well (Lassen 2012: 170, 179; Grayson 1987: 17, 32).

In later Old Assyrian seals, the bull altar becomes a prominent object of worship in its own right (Teissier 1994: 212, nos. 2–19). A variant of the bull altar, depicted as a mountain with four legs and a bull head, even appears as the focus of veneration by a suppliant goddess on a seal that was found in Acemhöyük but probably originated in Ashur (see [Figure 3.3b](#)). It is labeled “seal of the god Assur,” so at least in this case, the bull altar should depict the god himself (Özgüç 1980: fig. III-5a, b; Lassen 2012: 224–7). If the identification of the bull altar as an attribute of the god Assur is generally true, then its occurrence before the face of the seated figure in OA 1 royal presentation scenes presumably indicates that this seated king is Assur. This in turn may account for the addition of the standing goddess in front of the

worshipper – perhaps a mortal worshipper could not face this god without an intercessor.

Lassen's second major substyle for Old Assyrian seals, which she terms OA 2, features squat figures that are even more stylized and angular than OA 1. These seals are typically smaller than OA 1 and other contemporary styles. The OA 1 type of royal presentation scene remains the most common subject, now often accompanied by a secondary subject of animals, small humans, or deities. New primary subjects that appear in OA 2 seals include contests, worship scenes in which figures stand before a deity or divine symbols, and scenes featuring wheeled vehicles. The OA 2 style shows strong Anatolian influence, with compositions that often dispense with ground lines, allowing some figures to float above others, and the inclusion of Anatolian motifs, such as birds and rows of animals. Some of the seal designs were apparently mass-produced, with multiple seals having nearly-identical designs. Very few OA 2 seals are inscribed. The majority of the 24 identifiable owners were Assyrian men, but some were owned and used by Anatolians. Examples on eponym-dated texts show that OA 2 style seals first appeared at Kaniš around 1890 BCE, midway through the reign of Sargon I and, together with large numbers of Old Assyrian seals that cannot be assigned to any particular sub-style, soon virtually replaced the OA 1 style until the end of the karum II phase around 1836 BCE. Lassen argues that all of these differences from the OA 1 seals strongly suggest that the OA 2 seals were manufactured in Anatolia (Lassen 2012: 48–9, 63–79, 88–9, 180).

The few cylinder seals found at Ashur that seem to date to the Old Assyrian period show the same range of styles as in the sealings from Kaniš. Three seals, all of lapis lazuli, were found in Grave 20 together with a variety of jewelry and metalwork that dates to the late third to early second millennium (Haller 1954: 10, Taf. 10a–d; Harper et al. 1995: 44–62; Hockmann 2010: grave 37, 111–13, Taf. 10, 58–63). The earliest of the three is unusual in having its ends carved into the shape of the metal caps that sometimes adorned seals. The subject is a standing goddess leading a male worshipper into the presence of a seated goddess, carved in the Ur III modeled style. An inscription gives the name of the owner and his father. Aruz observed that the surface seems abraded as if in preparation for recarving (VA 5800b; Aruz, in Harper et al. 1995: 62; Hockmann 2010: 76–7, Taf. 61–2).

Another seal from Grave 20 initially showed a similar presentation scene in the Isin-Larsa style, with a standing goddess leading a male figure toward a seated goddess with a disk and crescent before her face (Figure 24.2). The Isin-Larsa attribution is indicated by the filling motifs of a ball-and-staff and vase between the two goddesses, and originally there was probably an inscription behind the seated goddess. During the Old Assyrian period, the presumed inscription was erased and replaced with a male worshipper facing a bull altar with a ball-and-staff and vase below it and a disk above. A small

figure between the standing goddess and worshipper was probably added at this time as well. With these additions, this Isin-Larsa seal was transformed into an Old Assyrian karum II-type seal (VA 5364; Aruz, in Harper et al. 1995: 60–1; Hockmann 2010: 76–7, Taf. 61–2).



Figure 24.2 Ashur, cylinder seal and modern impression showing a presentation scene and male worshipper facing a bull altar, from Grave 20, Old Assyrian Period, lapis lazuli, H: 2.1 cm; Berlin, VA 5364.

Source: Reproduced with permission of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Vorderasiatisches Museum, Foto: Olaf M. Teßmer.

The third seal from Grave 20, again with a heavily abraded surface that may indicate recarving, has a standard Old Assyrian presentation scene. Three standing figures of undetermined gender face right, the left arm of the first and third raised, that of the middle folded across the waist. They face a seated king, who holds a cup and has a crescent in front of his face. Behind the king stands a male figure with a conical hat. The squat proportions, linear style, stylized facial features, and Anatolian pointed hat all point to an Old Assyrian date at the height of the karum II trade (VA 5368; Aruz, in Harper et al. 1995: 61–2; Hockmann 2010: 76–7, Taf. 61–2). Together, these three seals exemplify both the sources of the Old Assyrian style in Ur III and Isin-Larsa glyptic, and the transformation of those styles in Ashur and Kaniš under the influence of local and foreign traditions.

A hematite seal found in the remains of a mud brick wall of the Sîn temple is an excellent example of the mature Old Assyrian style of the mid-19th century BCE. It depicts two male worshippers with upraised left arms and fork-like hands facing a bull altar, behind which is a recumbent gazelle and star. The figures, formed of patterns of hatched lines, are extremely stylized (VA 7945; Moortgat 1966: 130, no. 505, Taf. 61; Werner 2009: 28, cat. no. 29, Taf. 14). Two more seals seem to date to this period as well. One, of matt-gray limestone, shows a standing figure facing a seated god with a snake behind his back, and a second group of two standing figures facing a standing god. The carving is so stylized that the figures are barely recognizable (VA 5185;

Moortgat 1966: 131, no. 512, Taf. 61). The other, of hematite, is an Anatolian-influenced composition showing a standing man before a seated god who, unusually, faces right and sits on a lion. Between them are a small worshipper, a disk and crescent, and an offering table piled with three animals. Behind the god a kneeling man and pair of crossed animals float above a recumbent gazelle. The figures again have substantial areas of hatching (VA 4243; Moortgat 1966: 131, no. 513, Taf. 61).

Šamši-Adad I (1808–1776 BCE)

The rule of Šamši-Adad I overlaps with the early Old Babylonian period in the south, and this is reflected in the appearance of Old Babylonian style seal designs in Ashur. Šamši-Adad's own royal seal is known only from partial impressions that favor the inscription, which reads "Šamši-Adad, beloved of the god Assur, viceroy of the god Assur, [son of] Ila-kabkabuhu" (Grayson 1987: 61). Only the two figures adjacent to the inscription are preserved: the standing king facing right towards a suppliant goddess who faces left, with a gap between them that probably included one or more additional figures. Eppihimer observed that the garment and pose of the king parallel those of Hammurabi in his law stele, and therefore Šamši-Adad too may be facing a deity who, based on the text, should have been the god Assur (Eppihimer 2013: 49, fig. 11; Collon 1988: 47–8, no. 173).

One popular Old Babylonian type, contest scenes, is represented at Ashur by a beautifully-modeled hematite seal showing two upright lions attacking a gazelle standing upright between them. The lions are in turn pulled back by two six-curved heroes. The remaining space is occupied by a kneeling hero wrestling with a lion griffin (VA 4236; Moortgat 1966: 126, no. 467, Taf. 57). More typical are three seals that show presentation scenes, but now the god wears a garment that exposes the forward leg, which steps up on an object. All three feature Šamaš and all are carved in a naturalistic modeled style. One, a lapis lazuli seal from Tomb 35, shows a ruler standing before Šamaš (VA 4294; Haller 1954: 113, Taf. 23 g; Hockmann 2010: grave 13, 77, 102, Taf. 43). Another, of hematite, shows the same subject, with a second figure standing behind the ruler (VA 4225; Moortgat 1966: 118, no. 376, Taf. 47). The third, also hematite, has two subjects: the standing ruler offering a lamb to Šamaš, and two bald worshippers facing Marduk, who has a ring and rod in his outstretched right hand and his foot on a mušḫuššu-dragon (VA 4237; Moortgat 1966: 120, no. 396, Taf. 50).

A similar subject, but carved in the linear, heavily-hatched Old Assyrian style, is found on a hematite seal from Grave 19. A male worshipper holding an unidentifiable offering faces a god who stands on a griffin and holds a forked thunderbolt. Behind the god are a scorpion, a standing male, and a snake,

while a kneeling monkey and suppliant goddess are behind the worshipper. All of these motifs are familiar from the Anatolian-influenced karum II seals, as are the angular figures and hatched fill, but the composition with the focus on a central standing god is typically Old Babylonian, so this seal is probably to be dated to the karum Ib period around the time of Šamši-Adad I (VA 7831; Moortgat 1966: 131, no. 516, Taf. 61; Hockmann 2010: Grave 63, 76–7, 129, Taf. 109).

The Middle Assyrian Period

Aššur-bel-nišešu to Aššur-uballiṭ I (1407–1318 [1417–1328] BCE)

The only surviving art securely dated to the 14th century is imagery on cylinder seals, mostly known from their impressions on clay tablets and labels from Ashur. The most complete study of the glyptic of this period is still Beran (1957), which must however be used with caution since he believed incorrectly that all tablets from Ashur Archive 14446 date to the 14th century (for example his Abb. 33, 37, 38). The datable tablets from this period mostly come from the reigns of Eriba-Adad I (1380–1354 [1390–1364] BCE) and Aššur-uballiṭ I (1353–1318 [1363–1328] BCE), and the majority are in the Mittanian Nuzi style, with freely-disposed compositions featuring fantastic creatures, stylized trees, guilloche patterns, winged disks, and abstract symbols (Beran 1957: 168–215).

Contemporary with these, though, are a number of seals that exemplify a new approach to composition, while retaining the Nuzi motifs. Two of the best examples of this are the personal seals of these two kings. At first glance the seal of Eriba-Adad looks typically Mittanian, with two groups of tightly-knit composite figures filling the surface, but the large scale of the figures, their firm adherence to the ground line, and the sparing use of filling motifs distinguish this seal from its Mittanian source (Beran 1957: 144–5; Klengel-Brandt, in Harper et al. 1995: 103–4). The seal of Aššur-uballiṭ completes this break with tradition. It depicts only a single group of three monumental figures, two bird-headed winged figures stabbing a lion while holding it upside-down by its back legs between them (Beran 1957: 151–2; Klengel-Brandt, in Harper et al. 1995: 104–5). It is tempting to see this emphasis on subject at the expense of pattern as a deliberate revision of the purpose of glyptic imagery, from cosmic relationships to focused royal power.

Adad-nirari I to Tukulti-Ninurta I (1295–1197 [1305–1207] BCE)

The original, and still valuable, publication of cylinder seals and impressions of the 13th century from Ashur was by Moortgat (1942). In comparison with the 14th century seals they exhibit a distinctive style, designated “mature Assyrian” by Matthews in his extensive study of the seals from this period (1990: 89–114). Matthews divided the known seals and impressions into two groups, contest scenes (including peaceful scenes of animals and trees) and ritual scenes (everything else). Within the first group he was able to propose a chronology of seal motifs and subjects based on sealed dated tablets from the reigns of Adad-nirari I (1295–1264 [1305–1274] BCE), Shalmaneser I (1263–1234 [1273–1244] BCE), and Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233–1197 [1243–1207] BCE), bearing in mind that seals can be used long after they are created so that the date of a tablet provides only a terminus post quem for the date of the seal impressed upon it. Indeed, Nuzi-style seals continued to be used occasionally on tablets dating as late as Shalmaneser I and perhaps later (Moortgat 1942: 84–7).

Matthews observes that the most striking feature of the Assyrian-style seals from the time of Adad-nirari is the almost total absence of fantastic creatures, replaced by herbivorous animals, lions, and humans. The designs are characterized by a globular tree on a hill or a palm tree, which may be flanked by two rampant animals, by an animal on one side of the tree being shot by an archer from the other, or by an animal being attacked by a lion. Two unusual seal designs that probably date to this phase apparently feature scenes of domestication, one showing a man calming a horse and the other a man and ox plowing (Moortgat 1942: 59–60, 65–9, 74–6, 80–1, figs. 16–17, 32, 47–53, 65–7; Matthews 1990: 91–8, figs. 305–32; Aruz, in Harper et al. 1995: 99–100).

Three types of “contest” scenes characterize the seals of the succeeding Shalmaneser phase. The first is a simple composition featuring a standing animal facing a tree, which is neither a palm nor on a hill (Figure 24.3). The second is a contest with no tree present, showing a lion or man attacking an animal, or even combined in a triangular composition to show a man attacking a lion attacking an animal. A third type features a figure standing between two animals, either rampant or held upside down by a back leg. Fantastic creatures reappear in this phase, occasionally participating in these contests (Moortgat 1942: 52–3, 56–60, 70–3, 78–9, figs. 1–3, 8, 12–15, 38–45, 59, 61–2; Matthews 1990: 98–101, figs. 333–62, 431, 438; Klengel-Brandt, in Harper et al. 1995: 91–2, pl. 9a; Feldman 2006: 34–7). A unique variant of the motif of two animals flanking a tree probably dates to this or the preceding phase. It shows two bird-headed winged human figures flanking a palm tree, a motif

that also appears in the wall paintings from the palace of Tukulti-Ninurta I at Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta and reappears in the palace reliefs of Aššurnāširpal II at Kalḫu (Moortgat 1942: 77, fig. 55; Matthews 1990: 100, n. 144).



Figure 24.3 Ashur, cylinder seal and modern impression showing a nursing ewe facing a tree, from Tomb 45, Middle Assyrian Period, lapis lazuli, H: 2.1 cm; Berlin, VA Ass 1129.

Source: Reproduced with permission of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Vorderasiatisches Museum, Foto: Olaf M. Teßmer.

The final phase of the 13th century, associated with Tukulti-Ninurta, features formulaic contests between humans, lions, other animals, and fantastic creatures. The most popular is a triangular composition with two large figures fighting, often above a third smaller figure. Other possibilities for paired figures include one figure falling forward in front of the other, and one figure trying to escape from beneath the other. The composition featuring a figure standing between two rampant or upside-down animals continues into this phase as well (Moortgat 1942: 56, 60–6, 68–70, 77–9, figs. 7, 19–27, 31, 34–7, 54, 57–8, 60, 63; Matthews 1990: 101–5, figs. 363–429, 444, 446, 448; Aruz, in Harper et al. 1995: 101). An interesting variant of the triangular composition that apparently dates to this phase is centered on a palm tree, with an archer and gazelle on one side of the tree and a crouching lion facing them on the other side. The tree is a naturalistic palm with a garland of palmettes spread along the tips of its branches. Variants of this type of tree appear also in wall paintings from the palace at Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta, in seal impressions on tablets from the time of Tiglath-pileser I from Ashur, and in the palace reliefs of Aššurnāširpal II at Kalḫu (Moortgat 1942: 58, fig. 11; Moortgat 1944: 34–5, figs. 31–2; Matthews 1990: 95, n. 90, fig. 424).

Ritual scenes from the 13th century are not sufficiently numerous to distinguish compositional patterns that allow them to be grouped in chronological phases. The only subject that occurs in several exemplars from Ashur is a worship scene showing one or two humans facing a deity. Each of

the five published examples is slightly different: the worshippers can be standing or kneeling, the god is usually seated but in one case standing, there is usually an offering stand between the human and divine figures and astral symbols in the field above, and in two cases a tree stands behind the deity. One example shows two nearly identical worshippers, one standing and the other kneeling, before a divinity. Moortgat suggested that the image may represent the same worshipper in two successive poses, a compositional device used also on the cult pedestal of Tukulti-Ninurta I (Moortgat 1942: 81–4, figs. 69–73).

Four sculptured stone cult pedestals were found associated with the Ištar temple of Tukulti-Ninurta I, in what the excavator believed were secondary contexts. Depictions of similar pedestals on one of these pedestals and on cylinder seals from the time of Tiglath-pileser I show divine symbols on top of them. The tops of the preserved examples are smooth, suggesting that if symbols were placed on them, they were not permanently attached. Three pedestals were found in Room 6, an inner room beside the cult room. Two were carved on the upper part of the front and sides with a simple raised linear decoration and appeared to have been carefully installed. Both were placed next to the entrance wall, one facing toward the door and the other facing away, each had a pavement of baked bricks laid on the floor around it, and each had a votive deposit of beads beneath it (Ass. 19835, H: 80 cm; Ass. 19868; H: 91 cm; Andrae 1935: 23–5, 67–72).

The third pedestal in Room 6 was smaller than the others and appeared to have been installed later and with less care. It was located near the middle of the room facing toward the entrance, sitting somewhat tilted on an uneven floor of accumulated earth that covered the brick pavement, and without a votive deposit. The front of the upper part of this pedestal has a well-preserved relief image, while the lower part, which projects slightly to form a two-stepped base, is carved with an inscription (Figure 24.4). Only the first few lines of the inscription are well preserved. They identify this object as the platform of the god Nusku, “chief vizier of Ekur, bearer of the just scepter, courtier of the gods Assur and Enlil, who daily repeats the prayers of Tukulti-Ninurta” before Assur and Enlil. The inscription identifies the pedestal’s maker as Tukulti-Ninurta I, and suggests that it may originally have stood in Ekur, a name for the temple of Assur (Ass. 19869, H: 57.7 cm; Muscarella, in Harper et al. 1995: 112–13, pl. 14; Grayson 1987: 279–80). The relief image has three elements. At the right is a picture of a cult pedestal, like this one but without the relief decoration, atop which is a rectangular form bisected vertically by a slender tapering cylinder. At the left stands the figure of the king himself, holding a mace in his left hand and gesturing with his raised right hand toward the pedestal. In the center is the king again, with the same hand positions but now kneeling. These two poses apparently depict sequential action, with the king first approaching the pedestal and then

kneeling before it.



Figure 24.4 Ashur, cult pedestal from the Istar Temple, inscribed by Tukulti-Ninurta I, alabaster, H: 57.7 cm, Berlin, VA 8146.

Source: author.

Based on the text, the object on top of the pictured pedestal should be the symbol of Nusku. What it represents is uncertain, but it most resembles a tablet and stylus. In Babylonian kudurrus, however, including examples that apparently antedate Tukulti-Ninurta, Nusku is always represented by a lamp. Nabû, by contrast, only appears on kudurrus that post-date Tukulti-Ninurta, and is most often represented by a single or double stylus, depicted horizontally or vertically, and occasionally lying horizontally atop either a tablet or a writing board (Seidl 1989: 121–5, 128–30). If this is a tablet and stylus, then the Tukulti-Ninurta image would be the only case where Nusku is represented this way. This suggests that the Assyrian artist, perhaps unfamiliar with the Babylonian tradition for representing this Babylonian god, invented a new symbol, perhaps based on the god's role as intercessor, carrying the king's messages to the great gods as described on the accompanying text or perhaps, as Bahrani suggested, the tablet refers to Nusku's role as a god of dreams, delivering through dreams a favorable destiny from the gods to the

king. Another possibility, proposed by Wiggerman, is that the cylinder is the scepter of Nusku referred to in the text, but that leaves the rectangle behind it unexplained (Bahrani 2003: 192–8; Wiggermann 1985–86: 10).

The function of Room 6 is uncertain, but the presence of the pedestals may provide a clue. Andrae believed that the two pedestals with geometric decoration were originally in the adjacent main sanctuary, but their architectural context supports a different interpretation. The plan of Room 6, with its rectangular shape and single door at the end of a long wall, is consistent with that of a shrine. Andrae observed that the two geometric pedestals were installed beside this wall on the original floor level, with votive deposits underneath and paving bricks fitted around them, suggesting that they were part of the original furnishings of the room (Andrae 1935: Taf. 27). The orientation of the pedestals is also suggestive. The one nearer to the door faces toward the door and would be approached simply by turning right upon entering the room. The one further from the door faces away and would be approached by making a circuit around the room. This arrangement allows a worshipper to approach the deity located on either pedestal without turning his or her back on the other one, which suggests that Room 6 may have been used as a shrine from the beginning.

Room 6 was also a repository for the inscriptions of previous builders of the Iṣtar temple: an inscribed stone plaque of Zarriqum, builder of Iṣtar temple level E, was laid upside down into the floor pavement to the right of the door and an inscribed stone object of Iluṣuma, builder of Level D, was on the floor near the door surrounded by a votive deposit. These were the records of the two most recent kings who had completely rebuilt the Iṣtar temple, now incorporated into Tukulti-Ninurta's own new temple. Since the geometric pedestals are uninscribed, it is even possible that they and the inscribed objects were originally in the Iṣtar temple of Adad-nirari I, and were brought to the new temple along with Adad-nirari's stone foundation tablets (Andrae 1935: 42–8). In that case, Room 6 could have been a secondary shrine for cults originally maintained in the earlier temple. Whatever the explanation for the presence of these objects in Room 6, the archaeological evidence supports the room's use as a secondary sanctuary from the time the temple was constructed. At some point later in the life of the temple, presumably after the death of Tukulti-Ninurta I, his cult pedestal dedicated to Nusku was brought from the Assur temple to Room 6 of the Iṣtar temple and placed on the uneven surface of the layer of earth that had accumulated on the floor in the intervening years (Andrae 1935: Taf. 27b, d).

The fourth stone cult pedestal associated with the Iṣtar temple was found against the temple facade southeast of the main door just beyond the outer corner of the gate tower, where it had been placed together with the Ur III headless stone statue of a man (Ass. 20069, H: 103 cm; Andrae 1922: 108, Abb. 83; Andrae 1935: 59–67, Taf. 29). They were installed on a layer of

mortar and propped upright by small pieces of stone, leading Andrae to conclude that this was a secondary context for both pieces. It is shaped like the sculptured example from Room 6 and is decorated with two relief images, but is much larger and uninscribed. The larger image, on the upper part of the front of the pedestal, depicts three figures. Two of these, at the right and left facing towards one another, are protective figures characterized by a frontal face and hairstyle with six large curls. Each has a symbol shaped like an eight-spoked wheel on his head, each holds a vertical standard with a similar symbol atop it, and the same symbol appears in each of the volutes at the top corners of the pedestal. Andrae identified this as the symbol of Šamaš, the sun god, and proposed that these standards and their bearers stand at the door of that god's shrine. Between the two standards stands the figure of the king, probably Tukulti-Ninurta I, worshipping in the same dress and pose as on the Nusku pedestal.

The lower step of the pedestal's base is also carved on the front with a relief image, the earliest surviving example of narrative imagery in Assyrian art. This relief, which is much more eroded than the one on the upper part, was carefully examined by Moortgat-Correns (1988), who concluded that it depicts two files of prisoners, roped together and being led from the left and right through a mountainous landscape. The files converge on the central standing figure of the victorious Assyrian king, who holds the end of one of the ropes as the first prisoner kneels before him. Moortgat-Correns proposed that this kneeling figure is Abuli, king of the land Uqumeni, since he is the only defeated king of a mountainous land named in Tukulti-Ninurta's texts.

The earliest Assyrian wall paintings are from the "South Palace" of Tukulti-Ninurta I at Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta, found in fragments at the foot of the palace terrace. The motifs included palmettes, rosettes, animals, stylized trees, and bird-headed human genies in groups framed by geometric and floral borders, painted in dry fresco in a palette of black, white, blue, and red (Andrae 1925: 13–20, pls. 1–4; Wartke, in Harper et al. 1995: 110–11, pl. 13b).

Aššur-reša-iši I to Aššur-bel-kala (1132–1056 BCE)

Moortgat (1944) also published the 12th century cylinder seal impressions from Ashur. These were found on tablets and labels in archives dating to the reigns of Ninurta-tukulti-Aššur (1133 BCE) and Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 BCE). Most of the impressions show contest scenes similar to those of the late 13th century from Ashur (Moortgat 1944: 25–33, figs. 4–25; Matthews 1990: 104–5). Other subjects that continue into this period are a tree flanked by two figures, including the bird-headed winged human, as well as ritual scenes, a particularly elaborate example of which shows two humans making offerings to a striding deity on a lion, with a winged disk in the field above (Moortgat

A few impressions exemplify a new approach to landscape, depicting figures in settings that may have been identifiable to contemporaries as specific places. Two impressions on tablets of Tiglath-pileser I show architectural images of temples. One has a depiction of a towered temple facade, with clouds billowing above and streams of water flowing down to either side. A pair of goat fish flank its door, which frames a cult pedestal similar to those of Tukulti-Ninurta I (Moortgat 1944: 43, fig. 45; Klengel-Brandt, in Harper et al. 1995: 105–6). These figures beside the temple door recall the palace accounts of Tiglath-pileser I and his son Aššur-bel-kala (1073–1056 BCE), which describe statues of exotic creatures placed outside the doors. The other impression shows a standing figure, perhaps the king, wearing a fez and gesturing towards a towered temple facade. In the door are a pedestal with a dog sitting on it, perhaps the symbol of Gula, and a star (Moortgat 1944: 43–4, fig. 46). A related example is an actual seal found in the destruction debris of the Ištar temple of Tukulti-Ninurta I. It depicts a man standing before an incense stand and offering table in front of a four-stepped temple tower, with a star in the field above (Klengel-Brandt, in Harper et al. 1995: 99). Although the date is uncertain, the representation of architecture suggests the 12th century. Three impressions from a seal in the archive of Ninurta-tukulti-Aššur also exemplify the new emphasis on landscape. The composition shows two men in a chariot hunting ibexes in the mountains, depicted in a manner that would be at home in New Kingdom Egypt but is new to Assyria (Aruz, in Harper et al. 1995: 102–3).

An unusual limestone statue of a nude female from Nineveh is inscribed on the back with a text of Aššur-bel-kala (British Museum 124963; photos on British Museum website). The figure, which is somewhat under life size, is missing its head, feet, and forearms. The upper arms are preserved just past the bent elbows and both end in a flat surface drilled with a dowel hole, indicating that the forearms were carved separately and attached. The sharp upward bend of the elbows and the nearly horizontal angle of the attachment surfaces indicate that the forearms extended almost straight up in front of the body, reminiscent of the upraised arms of suppliant goddesses in early second millennium cylinder seals (Reade 2002b: 556–7, 563). The seven-line inscription, which runs horizontally across the back just above the waist, states that Aššur-bel-kala “had these statues made for the pleasure of the citizens and foreigners” (Grayson 1991: 108, with alterations from Assyrian Dictionary, A/1, 1964: 333, 389).

A new type of monument that appears from the eleventh to ninth centuries is the so-called obelisk, a four-sided stone stele characterized by a slightly tapering shaft of rectangular section and a stepped top. They are decorated all around with a combination of pictures and text, suggesting a free-standing location. The complete examples measure less than 3 meters in height. The

ancient name for this type of object is not known; their modern designation as obelisks originates with Layard's account of the discovery of the Black Obelisk (Layard 1849a: I, 345; Russell 2003–05).

Fragments of an obelisk from Ashur that may date to the reign of Tiglath-pileser I or Aššur-bel-kala are discussed with the obelisks of Aššurnāṣirpal II below. The earliest well-dated example is the limestone "Broken Obelisk," found by Hormuzd Rassam near the center of the mound of Kuyunjik (ancient Nineveh) in the area of the Ištar temple. Although the name of its patron is lost, it is generally dated to the reign of Aššur-bel-kala on the basis of similarities to that king's texts. Only the upper part of the obelisk is preserved. Curtis reported that its surface was damaged by an inappropriate cleaning technique, resulting in "fanciful" cuneiform signs and sculptural details. At the top center on the front is a rectangular sculptured panel showing the bareheaded king standing at left. In his left hand he holds a mace and ropes tethered to two kneeling figures wearing floppy-topped hats, while two smaller bareheaded figures kneel behind them. The king's right hand is outstretched to receive a bow handed down from above by a winged disk, probably representing Šamaš, at the center of a group of five divine symbols. The other symbols at the top are a horned crown, apparently a crescent (only recognizable in pre-cleaning photographs), a thunderbolt, and a rosette, presumably representing Assur, Sîn, Adad, and Ištar. By contrast, the first two gods listed at the beginning of the inscription are Assur and Ea. Most of the remainder of the space on the shaft is covered with a long inscription (British Museum 118898, H: 63 cm; Börker-Klähn 1982: Nr. 131; Grayson 1991: 99–105, no. 7; Reade 2005: 373; Curtis 2007: 53–7).

The "White Obelisk," also of limestone, was also found by Rassam on Kuyunjik, near the Broken Obelisk in the area of the Ištar temple ([Figure 24.5](#)). It is intact, though worn, and stands 2.85 m tall. In contrast to the Broken Obelisk, most of the shaft is covered with relief images, while the text is confined to two small areas on the steps at the top and an epigraph on one of the sculptured panels. The inscription is often considered to be unfinished, but in fact is two short texts labeling the events on the front and left sides. The reliefs are arranged in eight registers, each of which runs uninterrupted around the obelisk. When read from top to bottom, they show the king at war, making offerings to a deity, receiving tribute, banqueting, and hunting, essentially the events of a successful campaign and its aftermath. The registers are arranged so that the two longest scenes, which extend around all four sides, are in the center at eye level, and the length of the scenes gradually decreases to three, then two, and finally one side as the eye moves toward the top and bottom. This sophisticated arrangement maximizes visual comprehension of the imagery by allowing the viewer to focus on the extended images in the center while simultaneously taking in progressively shorter episodes peripherally. It also emphasizes receipt of tribute as the central focus of the monument

(London, British Museum 118807; Stein 1993–97: 302–3; Pinches 1883: 112–21; Börker-Klähn 1982: Nr. 132; Pittman 1996; Grayson 1991: 254–6, no. 18).



Figure 24.5 Nineveh, White Obelisk, probably of Aššurnāširpal I or II, limestone, H: 285 cm, London, British Museum 118807.

Source: author.

The date of the White Obelisk is a matter of considerable controversy (Unger 1932; Sollberger 1974; Reade 1975; von Soden 1975). The inscription lacks a royal genealogy, but describes events in the eponym of Aššurnāširpal, which suggests a date early in the reign of a king Aššurnāširpal. Opinion is divided on whether this is Aššurnāširpal I (1049–1031 BCE), the nephew of Aššurbel-kala, or Aššurnāširpal II (883–859 BCE). The evidence of the inscription has generally been thought to favor Aššurnāširpal II, both in general style and content, and in specific references to the land of Gilzanu, unattested in texts prior to Tukulti-Ninurta II, and to the bit-natḥi temple at Nineveh, otherwise known only from texts of Aššurnāširpal II.

In support of an attribution to Aššurnāširpal I, Frahm recently published a campaign account that he showed may plausibly be attributed to Aššurnāširpal I on the basis of the eponyms named in it. This new text describes in detail a campaign in the king's eponym year to Ḫabḫu lands, a place name that Frahm also identified (written in exactly the same way) in his new provisional collation of the text on the White Obelisk. Frahm noted, however, that Aššurnāširpal II also campaigned against Ḫabḫu in his eponymate, so while the presence of Ḫabḫu in the obelisk text provides an additional possible link to Aššurnāširpal I, it does not rule out Aššurnāširpal II. Frahm further observed that an elaborate ceremonial bed dedicated by Aššurnāširpal I to Ištar of Nineveh was likely for the bit-natḥi, which would provide another possible link between the obelisk and that king. Therefore, while Frahm's observations strengthen the case for Aššurnāširpal I, they do not weaken the case for Aššurnāširpal II (Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum, VAT 10803 + VAT 11063; Frahm 2009: 117–23).

By contrast, the visual evidence, particularly the chariot poles, the fez worn by courtiers, and the preponderance of bearded courtiers and attendants, suggests a date prior to the known images of Aššurnāširpal II. One way to reconcile these contradictions is to date the White Obelisk to the beginning of the reign of Aššurnāširpal II, prior to the revolution in image and text fostered by the move to Kalḫu, but some scholars feel this is not early enough to account for the differences.

The Neo-Assyrian Period: Sculpture and Painting

In the sections that follow, monumental sculpture and painting are arranged by reign, while portable arts, which are often difficult to date precisely, are grouped by type. Most Neo-Assyrian monumental art was made under the

patronage of the king. The most prevalent type by far was wall reliefs, stone slabs carved with images and texts that lined the walls of important rooms in palaces and temples. Other types of reliefs included bull and lion colossi, usually human headed, that stood in the major doorways of palaces and temples and in the most important city gates. Also in doorways, the wooden door leaves were embellished with strips of bronze, decorated in low relief with figures and ornaments in repoussé. Reliefs could be carved underfoot as well, with historical images on throne bases and floral patterns on threshold slabs. In many places wall reliefs were supplemented by, or even wholly replaced by, paintings. These were done in two different media, the choice probably being governed by location. Exterior walls were decorated with painted glazed bricks. On interior walls, pigment was applied to the whitewashed mud plaster that covered the mud brick. Because of their fragility, most of these paintings are now lost. Outdoors, steles and obelisks were sometimes placed in public locations, as were rock reliefs, carved on natural rock surfaces to mark areas reached during royal campaigns or the location of royal construction projects (Russell 1998–2001).

Aššurnāṣirpal II (883–859 BCE)

The earliest surviving Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs are from the Northwest Palace of Aššurnāṣirpal II at Kalḫu, modern Nimrud. The inspiration for such reliefs may have come from Aššurnāṣirpal's campaign to the Mediterranean, probably in his ninth year, during the course of which he would have seen Neo-Hittite architecture decorated with wall reliefs (Winter 1982; Cifarelli 1995: 161; Russell 1999a: 227–9). In the Northwest Palace, wall reliefs were confined to the interior and exterior of the throne-room suite and the interior of the large reception suites around the inner court. The reliefs were for the most part well-preserved, as the destruction of the palace seems not to have been accompanied by extensive burning. Most of the reliefs derive from the excavations of A.H. Layard (1849a). The Iraq State Organization for Antiquities and Heritage restored the area of the decorated state apartments as a site museum where visitors were able to view a large number of reliefs in their original context (Figure 24.6) until it was destroyed with explosives by ISIS in April 2015. The definitive publications of the palace reliefs are Meuszynski (1981) and Paley and Sobolewski (1987, 1992).



Figure 24.6 Kalḫu (modern Nimrud), wall reliefs showing apotropaic deities and palm trees, Northwest Palace of Aššurnaširpal II, Room S, Slabs 20–22, calcareous gypsum, W: 646 cm.

Source: author.

The throne-room facade and several other major entrances in the palace were decorated with human-headed bull and lion colossi (Nimrud, Northwest Palace Museum; London, British Museum; Baghdad, Iraq Museum; New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art). Apart from their size – the largest were nearly 6 meters in length and height – their most striking feature is their combination in a single figure of two distinct relief images: a static frontal view showing two legs, and a striding side view showing four legs, the result being a five-legged creature. The walls at both ends of the throne-room facade were paneled with slabs carved with images of western foreigners presenting tribute to the king. At the west end of the facade, these tributaries were shown approaching an image of the king, while at the east end, two tribute processions converged on a doorway, beyond which was the enthroned king himself. Carved across the middle of each slab, and on every other wall slab in the palace, was a text – the so-called “Standard Inscription” – that gave the name, genealogy, titles, and epithets of the king, summarized his territorial conquests, and described the construction of Kalḫu and the new palace (Grayson 1991: 268, no. 23).

The throne room walls were also covered with reliefs. Directly opposite the central door of the facade, which may have been the location for a temporary throne, and at the east end of the room behind the permanent stone throne base were niches raised somewhat above floor level, each carved with a similar scene. On both, images of the king and a winged deity are shown

twice, symmetrically flanking a stylized palm tree, above which is a deity in a winged disk. Apparently the king is worshipping the god in the disk, probably Šamaš, who extends to him the rod and ring, an emblem of authority. Simultaneously, the king receives the protection of the anthropomorphic deities and the palm tree, both of which have apotropaic powers. Brentjes has plausibly proposed that the two kings on each of these slabs could be seen as Aššurnāširpal's predecessors, Tukulti-Ninurta II and Adad-nirari II, who also figure prominently in the genealogy at the beginning of the Standard Inscription. If so, then these royal forbears placed to either side of the throne emphasize Aššurnāširpal's legitimacy through recognition of his royal lineage. The relief behind the throne would therefore confer authority, legitimacy, and protection on its occupant (Brentjes 1994; Russell 1998b).

In the corners of the throne room and beside doorways are more images of stylized palms and winged deities. The slabs on the long walls were divided into three unequal registers. The wider upper and lower registers displayed a continuous series of images that are usually termed "narrative," while on the narrower central register the Standard Inscription was carved complete on each slab. The relief subjects are royal hunts and royal military conquests. Several suggestions have been made about the identity of the cities and regions shown in the military scenes, but as the images carry no written labels and bear no direct relationship to the accompanying Standard Inscription, these remain speculative (Winter 1981; Reade 1985; Cifarelli 1995).

Each of the other three sculptured suites that surrounded the central courtyard (Y) featured a different subject in its major reception rooms. Military conquest and hunts were the subjects of at least some of the reliefs in the West Suite, which may have been a secondary throne room suite and assembly hall. In the East Suite, which was apparently a ceremonial space, Rooms G and H show the king sitting or standing holding his bow and a bowl, engaged in an activity that may most plausibly be identified as pouring libations (Brandes 1970). In some of the images in Room G, the bowl is replaced by a pair of arrows held aloft, apparently receiving the blessing of the gods to whom the offerings are made. In these rooms, therefore, the source of the king's power is identified with his activity as chief priest of the gods of Assyria. Reception Room S in the South Suite, which was probably the king's residential suite, as well as Room F in the throne-room suite and a number of smaller rooms in all three suites, were decorated almost entirely with combinations of the stylized palm tree and winged deities, some with human heads and others with heads of birds. Winged deities were also placed on the jambs of all the doorways that were not decorated with colossi. As the function of the winged deities and palm trees is apotropaic, the decoration of these rooms evidently afforded their occupants a measure of protection from terrestrial and supernatural threats.

Aššurnāširpal's temples at Kalḫu were also decorated with reliefs. Two of

these, the temples of Ninurta and Šarrat-nip̄ḫi, were located directly to the north of the palace. In the Ninurta temple, the relief decoration was confined to major doorways. The main entrance contained two human-headed lion colossi, flanked on the outside by human- and bird-headed protective figures. Both jambs of the subsidiary entrance were lined with reliefs showing a combat between a deity and a monster. Human figures flanked this door on the outside and fish-men on the inside. The interior doorway connecting the antechamber and shrine was lined with winged figures carrying maces and flanked on the inside and outside by human figures. Three doorways in the courtyard of the temple of Šarrat-nip̄ḫi were decorated with colossi: a pair of colossal lions on the north side at the entrance to the sanctuary, a pair of larger lion-footed colossi with the upper parts missing in the outer gate on the east side, and a pair of small (1 m high) human-headed bulls in a doorway at the west side (London, British Museum 124572; Mosul Museum; Reade 2002a: 167–94; Hussein 2008: 91–5; Hussein, Kertai, and Altaweel 2013: 104–8, pls. XLV–XLIX).

Layard also found a beautifully-preserved statue of Aššurnāširpal II in the temple of Šarrat-nip̄ḫi, together with the original base on which it stood, near the cult dais at the west end of the cella. The statue is made of yellowish magnesite and the base of pink dolomite – both are unusual materials for Assyrian sculpture and may have been imported. The king is standing, bare-headed and wrapped in a long fringed garment, holding a ceremonial sickle in his right hand and a mace in his left. Carved across his chest is a seven-line inscription that gives the king's genealogy and the extent of his conquests. Although at 113 cm tall the statue itself is under life size, Winter observed that the base brings its total height to 191 cm, or just over six feet, making the figure stand taller than most humans. If the find spot was near the statue's original location, then it evidently stood facing the goddess and its inscription was addressed to her (British Museum 118871; Layard 1853a: 361; Reade, in Curtis and Reade 1995: 43; Reade 2002a: 184, 187, fig. 47; Grayson 1991: 305–6; Winter 1997: 375, 380 n. 36).

The Central Building, probably another temple of Aššurnāširpal II, was located in the center of the Kalḫu citadel. Its facade was decorated with two pairs of addorsed colossi, each pair consisting of a lion at right and a bull at left, with a winged deity holding a fawn in between. The colossi were probably human-headed, but the upper parts are now lost. Inside was a doorway lined with a winged figure between rampant lions and flanked on the inside by a human figure and outside by a scorpion man. A second slab with a stylistically somewhat different winged figure between rampant lions was found nearby (Barnett and Falkner 1962: pls. 126–7; Meuszynski 1976).

At Nineveh, the Iṣtar temple of Aššurnāširpal II was also decorated with wall reliefs, two fragmentary examples of which were recovered during excavations: one was a procession of three tributaries before the king and the

other showed the king hunting lions in the upper register and pouring a libation over a dead lion in the lower (Russell 1998a: pls. 214–20; Reade 2005: 375–9). Excavations at Dur-Katlimmu on the Khabur turned up two joining fragments of an Aššurnaširpal wall relief that depicted an Assyrian courtier holding a bow and fly whisk, presumably accompanying the king, as in the image of the enthroned king with a similar courtier on slab 3 in Room G of the Northwest Palace (Kühne 1987–88: fig. 17). It is carved in the finest court style, identical to that of the Kalḫu palace, which suggests that Dur-Katlimmu was a center of considerable importance during Aššurnaširpal's reign.

A number of fragmentary glazed orthostat tiles of Aššurnaširpal's father, Tukulti-Ninurta II (890–884 BCE), found in the Anu-Adad temple at Ashur show military scenes and lion hunts (London, British Museum 115705–115708; Andrae 1925: 25–31, pls. 7–9). A similar well-preserved glazed tile from Kalḫu, possibly of Aššurnaširpal II, shows the king and courtiers (London, British Museum 90859; Reade 1983: fig. 41). From Aššurnaširpal's palace at Kalḫu come fragments of painted bricks and wall paintings – mostly stylized arrangements of geometric, floral, and animal forms, but narrative subjects as well (Layard 1849b: pls. 84, 86; Albenda 2005: 1–14). No wall paintings have been reported from Nineveh, but painted bricks that showed military scenes and geometric patterns were found in the area of the Istar Temple (Thompson and Hutchinson 1929a: pl. LVII; 1931: 82–3, pls. XXVI, XXVIII–XXXII; Nunn 1988: Abb. 125–30). At least some of these probably date to the time of Aššurnaširpal II.

In 1878 Hormuzd Rassam found bronze strips that had decorated two pairs of wooden gates in what was probably a palace of Aššurnaširpal II at Balawat (ancient Imgur-Enlil), a way station on the road to Babylon some 28 kilometers southeast of Nineveh. One of these had reliefs and inscriptions of Shalmaneser III and the other of Aššurnaširpal II. The Aššurnaširpal gate reliefs comprised sixteen bronze bands, eight on each gate, each decorated in repoussé with a single register of relief with a floral border. Four of the bands showed the king hunting lions and wild oxen and the remainder depicted military conquest and tribute. The images were each labeled with a brief cuneiform caption. In 1956, Mallowan reinvestigated Balawat and excavated a temple dedicated to Mamu, god of dreams, which contained another Aššurnaširpal II bronze gate. It also comprised sixteen bands decorated with scenes of conquest and tribute (London, British Museum 124685–124700; Mosul Museum; Curtis and Tallis, eds. 2008).

Aššurnaširpal's steles are of two general types: obelisks, carved with images on all sides, and slabs, sculptured only on the front. The fragmentary basalt "Rassam Obelisk" was found just outside the entrance to Aššurnaširpal's temple in the center of Kalḫu citadel, near a stone base upon which it may originally have stood (London, British Museum 118800; Reade 1980). It

originally had twenty-eight horizontal relief panels framed by raised margins, with seven panels stacked vertically on each side and arranged to align with the equivalent panels on adjacent sides, resulting in the effect of horizontal registers of four panels as one walks around the monument. The subject of its reliefs was the delivery of tribute. On the raised margin below each register was a one-line text that extended around all four sides, labeling the tribute depicted.

Nearly 300 basalt obelisk fragments were recovered during excavations in the temple and palace precinct on the north side of Ashur. The fragments were carved with images, inscriptions, or both, all documenting the delivery of tribute. In an exemplary study, Orlamünde (2011) divided these fragments on the basis of material and carving style into three types, and Frahm published the inscriptions. On the basis of their analysis, it seems likely that each of these types corresponds to one obelisk, so they will be referred to here provisionally as Obelisks I, II (discussed here), and III (see Shalmaneser III below). Although not enough is preserved to permit a full reconstruction of the layout and size of any one of these obelisks, it is clear that each was divided into registers and panels similar to the Rassam Obelisk. They differ from the Rassam Obelisk, however, in that each panel has its own short caption (Frahm in Orlamünde 2011: 72).

Fragments of Obelisk I were found scattered throughout the northern part of Ashur, forming no pattern that would suggest its original location. Concerning its date, Frahm observed that one of its captions includes the place name Lumaš, which is only attested in texts of Tiglath-pileser I, and consequently he proposed a date of Tiglath-pileser or his successor Aššur-bel-kala. Furthermore, Reade previously observed that a fragment of this obelisk shows tribute of a large reptile, apparently a crocodile, and these two kings are the only ones who include crocodiles in their tribute lists. Nevertheless, Reade felt that the artistic parallels for this obelisk are ninth century. Obelisk I is very similar to the Rassam Obelisk in material, layout, and artistic style, all of which are completely different from both the Broken Obelisk of Aššur-bel-kala and the White Obelisk. As Orlamünde observed, if the early date is correct, then no significant stylistic development can have taken place between Tiglath-pileser I and Aššurnasirpal II (Reade 1981: 146; Grayson 1987: 42, 104; Orlamünde 2011: 15, 17–25, 52–3, 59–62, 71, 95, Taf. 1–10, 49).

The majority of the fragments of Obelisk II were found near the east corner of the outer facade of the Anu-Adad temple. Reade observed that Andrae excavated a gate here in the space between the Anu-Adad temple and Old Palace and found an uninscribed basalt base in the angle next to the east jamb that would be the right size for an obelisk. The problem with this suggestion is that the base stood in a corner, so that only two faces would be visible of an obelisk standing there. Stylistically, this obelisk dates to the reign of

Aššurnaširpal II or Shalmaneser III – the fragmentary captions do not provide enough information to determine which one (Andrae 1909: 68–70, Taf. III, V, XXVIII-XXX; Reade 1981: 150; Orlamünde 2011: 15–16, 25–37, 53–5, 62–7, 71, 96, Taf. 11–26, 48, 50–1). Basalt and limestone obelisk fragments probably of Aššurnaširpal II were also found in the area of the Ištar temple at Nineveh (Reade 1981: 151–4; Börker-Klähn 1982: Nr. 139–44).

Aššurnaširpal's steles are divided between his capital of Kalḫu and the periphery of his realm. The “Banquet Stele” is a rectangular sandstone slab that was set up in a small room next to the left entrance of Aššurnaširpal's throne room at Kalḫu. The king is depicted in a small rectangular panel at the top center, standing facing left, holding a staff in his right hand and a mace in his left, and flanked by symbols of deities. The remainder of the slab is covered with an inscription that describes the banquet held to celebrate the completion of the palace (Mosul Museum; Börker-Klähn 1982: Nr. 137).

Two more steles, found far apart, are both vertical limestone slabs with an arched top. The image of the standing king, facing left, occupies the full height of the slab, his left hand holding a mace, his right pointing upward toward symbols of deities in the field before his face. The remainder of the surface is covered with a lengthy inscription. One stele stood to the right of the subsidiary entrance in the courtyard of the Ninurta temple at Kalḫu. There was an altar in front of it, suggesting that one could make offerings here to the deities depicted on it. The other was found at Kurkh on the upper Tigris some 20 kilometers southeast of Diyarbakır, Turkey (London, British Museum 118805, 118883; Budge 1914: pl. 2; Börker-Klähn 1982: Nr. 135–6). A similar fragmentary stele, but with the king facing right, was found at Babil, the source of the ancient Subnat river (Adana Museum; Hawkins 1969; Börker-Klähn 1982: Nr. 134). This is presumably the stele that Aššurnaširpal says he erected at the source of the Subnat, beside steles of his predecessors Tiglath-pileser and Tukulti-Ninurta (Grayson 1991: 201–2). Since references to “the source of the river Subnat” recur frequently in Aššurnaširpal's texts as one of the geographical indicators of the extent of his realm, it follows that this stele, and probably the one from Kurkh, was erected both as a territorial marker and as a means of establishing Aššurnaširpal's place in the line of great Assyrian conquerors.

Shalmaneser III (858–824 BCE)

One of the best-preserved paintings from ancient Assyria is a large-scale arched panel of glazed bricks from Shalmaneser III's new palace, the arsenal (“Fort Shalmaneser”) at Kalḫu. It was composed of over 300 bricks that included symmetrical images of Shalmaneser flanking a god in a winged disk and bulls flanking a stylized tree (Baghdad, Iraq Museum; Reade 1963). Fort

Shalmaneser had no wall reliefs, but at the east end of the throne room was a large limestone throne base decorated with reliefs. On its front was an image of the Babylonian king Marduk-zakir-šumi clasping the hand of Shalmaneser, who had helped him quell a rebellion, while its sides are carved with scenes of tribute being brought before the king, each labeled with a brief text describing the origin and type of tribute shown. Inscribed on its top is a lengthy text summarizing the king's first thirteen years of rule (Baghdad, Iraq Museum; Mallowan 1966: II, figs. 369–71; Grayson 1996: 101). Marcus (1987) provided a stimulating analysis of the principles of organization of the throne base reliefs, as well as those on the Black Obelisk and Balawat doors.

Of similar character are the reliefs on the Black Obelisk, found by Layard in front of the Aššurnāṣirpal II temple in the center of the Kalḫu citadel ([Figure 24.7](#)). The black limestone obelisk stands 198 cm high and is intact except for some wear at the base. Its twenty relief panels are arranged around all four sides in five registers, each showing the delivery of tribute from a different land, each labeled with an epigraph that identifies the tribute and its source. From the top, the subjects are tribute from Gilzanu, Jehu son of Omri (Ḫumri = Israel), Mušri (probably Egypt), Suḫi, and Patina. Of particular note are the exotic animals received from Mušri, including a rhinoceros, and the depiction of Jehu of Israel, whose deeds are also recorded in the Bible (2 Kings 9–10). Marcus argued that these five lands were selected to express the extent and security of the Assyrian commercial network, signifying Shalmaneser's control over trade by land, river, and sea. In addition to the images, the obelisk's upper and lower parts carry a long inscription summarizing the events of Shalmaneser's first thirty-one years (London, British Museum 118885; Pritchard 1969: no. 351–4; Börker-Klähn 1982: Nr. 152; Marcus 1987; Grayson 1996: 62, 148–51).



Figure 24.7 Kalḫu (modern Nimrud), Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III, black limestone, H: 198 cm, London, British Museum 118885.

Source: author.

Most of the fragments of Obelisk III, the third obelisk from Ashur, were found in the eastern part of the small “Middle Courtyard” of the Assur temple, suggesting that it originally stood near the entrance to the inner “Main Courtyard.” Based on the occurrence of the personal names Puḥame and Katê in the captions on two of these fragments, Frahm dated Obelisk III to Shalmaneser III, an attribution supported as well by similarity of the garments and containers of the tribute bearers to those on Shalmaneser’s Black Obelisk (Orlamünde 2011: 16, 37–51, 55, 67–71, 97, Taf. 27, 51).

It is noteworthy that all of the obelisks and fragments described here were apparently found in the vicinity of temples. Furthermore, while the few preserved inscriptions on obelisks focus mainly on military successes, the imagery on the Neo-Assyrian examples features the delivery of tribute. This suggests that the function of obelisks was to display to the gods the economic success of the king, in pictures that depict a flow of wealth into the empire, and in text that describes how this wealth was acquired. In addition, if the placement of imagery on all four sides indicates that obelisks were meant to be walked around, this implies a mobile viewer and a free-standing setting, suggesting that they were intended for a human audience as well.

Near the Aššurnāṣirpal building in the center of the Kalḫu citadel were also the remains of a Shalmaneser III building. The largest feature was a pair of bull colossi inscribed on front and back with a text recounting Shalmaneser’s first eighteen years. These should have marked the entrance to a palace or temple, but the building itself has disappeared (Grayson 1996: 42–8; Sobolewski 1982b; Russell 1999a: 72–9). A lion colossus bearing a Shalmaneser inscription was found in the east gate of the Kalḫu citadel (Mallowan 1966: I, fig. 6).

The most extensive group of Shalmaneser III reliefs were 16 bronze bands that embellished a pair of wooden doors in the palace at Balawat. Each band was divided into two registers, decorated in repoussé with lively images of royal military campaigns and delivery of tribute. The subjects are drawn from the king’s first eleven years, each labeled with a brief epigraph giving the location of the event. A long text summarizing Shalmaneser’s first thirteen years was engraved on two bronze strips, one on the edge of each door (most in London, British Museum 124651-124663; King 1915; Unger 1920; Grayson 1996: 27). A decorated bronze band, possibly also dating to Shalmaneser III, was found in the Anu-Adad temple at Ashur (Andrae 1909: Taf. 33).

Four statues of Shalmaneser III are known, two from Kalḫu and two from Ashur. The best preserved is an under life size (103 cm) standing statue in white limestone from Room NE 50, a workshop or store room in Fort Shalmaneser. As with the Aššurnāṣirpal II statue, the king is bare-headed and wrapped in a long fringed garment, but this figure’s hands are folded in front of his waist and he wears a necklace with divine pendants. Traces of black

paint were preserved on the hair, beard and necklace. The bottom of the statue had been broken and repaired in antiquity by drilling dowel holes, which perhaps explains why it was found in a workshop area. The inscription, carved on the front below the waist, is addressed to Adad of Kurba'il, in whose temple the statue must originally have stood. The text continues with accounts of the campaigns of Shalmaneser's 18th through 20th years, and concludes with the statement that he erected this beautiful image in gišnugallu-stone before Adad, in hopes that the god would be pleased and bless the king with health and longevity (Baghdad, Iraq Museum 60497; Oates 1962: 16–17, pl. VIII; Kinnier-Wilson 1962; Grayson 1996: 58–61).

The other statue from Kalḫu, also in white limestone, was found in pieces by a farmer in the lower town near the southeast corner of the citadel, and reassembled with considerable restoration. The pose is the same as the Kurba'il statue, but the figure is taller (140 cm) and wears the traditional royal crown. The fragmentary inscription, which gives no information about the statue's original dedication or location, records campaigns through the king's thirty-first year and concludes with a hunting account (Baghdad, Iraq Museum 60496; Laessøe 1959; Grayson 1996: 72–84).

According to their inscriptions, both statues from Ashur originally stood in the Tabira gate, at the northwest corner of the city mound. One is a life-size (135 cm high) headless male figure in basalt, seated on a simple block throne and footstool. It was found by Layard during his brief excavations at the west side of Ashur, and based on Layard's account Andrae concluded that it came from the area of the Tabira gate. On the sides and back of the throne is an inscription that begins with Shalmaneser's titles and a brief summary of the campaign of his ninth year, continues with an account of his reconstruction of the city wall from the Tabira gate to the Tigris, his creation of a new statue of the god Kidudu, the guardian of the city wall, and concludes with a list of the city gates. Although the subject of this statue has often been identified in publications as Shalmaneser, it is clear from the text that this is in fact his statue of the god Kidudu (British Museum 118886; Layard 1849a: II, 50–2; Andrae 1913, vol. I: 12, 38, 169–70, Blatt 13; vol. II: Taf. XCVII; Grayson 1996: 97–9; British Museum website, collection search).

The other Ashur statue, excavated in secondary context in a Parthian building, is a headless standing basalt statue of Shalmaneser III. It was found in fragments and reconstructed in Istanbul with a somewhat odd-looking head based on the statue of Aššurnāṣirpal II. When complete, the figure would have been slightly over life size, standing nearly two meters tall. The king is wrapped in the usual long fringed garment, holds a mace in his left hand and a sickle in his right, and wears a necklace with divine pendants. The lengthy inscription, carved on the front, left side, and back, summarizes selected campaigns through the 26th year and concludes with the statement that Shalmaneser rebuilt the walls of Ashur and placed this statue of himself in the

Tabira gate. It seems possible, therefore, that this statue once stood in front of the statue of Kidudu in a chapel at the Tabira gate (Istanbul, Archaeological Museum 6450; Andrae 1913, vol. I: 12, 37–8, 172, Blatt 13; Grayson 1996: 117–19).

One stele and three rock reliefs of Shalmaneser III are known. The stele, in limestone, is from Kurkh and is very similar to the Aššurnāširpal II Kurkh stele (London, British Museum 118884; Smith 1938: pl. 1). Two of the rock reliefs are from the tunnel at the source of the Tigris at Birklin, some 65 kilometers north of Diyarbakır, Turkey, and the other is from Kenk Boghazi, on the Euphrates some 60 kilometers northeast of Gaziantep (Börker-Klähn 1982: Nr. 149–51). All of these reliefs show the standing figure of the king facing left.

Šamši-Adad V (823–811), Adad-nirari III (810–783), and Shalmaneser IV (782–773 BCE)

Most of the known examples of relief sculpture from the reigns of these kings are steles. Hormuzd Rassam found a very fine limestone stele of Šamši-Adad V to the right of the inner door in the gate chamber (NT1) of the sanctuary court of the Nabû temple at Kalḫu ([Figure 24.8](#)). The standing king faces left – toward the door – in the usual pose with deity symbols in front of his face (London, British Museum 118892; Smith 1938: pl. 2; Grayson 1996: 180).



Figure 24.8 Kalḫu (modern Nimrud), stele of Šamši-Adad V, limestone, H: 195 cm, London, British Museum 118892.

Source: author.

At Kalḫu, the walls of Adad-nirari III's palatial reception suite to the south of Aššurnaširpal's palace were painted with stylized arrangements of bulls and geometric and floral motifs. Similar painted decorations were found on the walls of Adad-nirari's palace in area PD 5 (Layard 1849b: pls. 86–7; Mallowan 1954: 70, 153–63, pl. XXXVI; Albenda 2005: 14–20). An obelisk fragment from the area of the Iṣtar temple at Nineveh that shows the head of a tributary holding a bowl includes the name Zakur, suggesting a date of Adad-nirari III (London, British Museum 120429; Reade 1981: 151–2, pl. 20c). If correct, this would be the latest known Assyrian obelisk.

Adad-nirari III is shown facing right in the usual pose on a high quality stele of calcareous gypsum (“Mosul marble”) found at Tell al-Rimah, 13 kilometers south of modern Tell Afar in western Assyria. It was apparently set up by the Assyrian governor (LÚ.GAR.KUR) Nergal-ereš (at least 803–775 BCE). The text includes a lengthy list of the cities under the control of Nergal-ereš, which was later erased, presumably when this official fell from favor (Baghdad, Iraq Museum; Page 1968; Grayson 1996: 209). The two halves of another stele of Adad-nirari III – the upper part acquired by Rassam in 1879 at Tell Sheikh Hamad (ancient Dur-Katlimmu) in eastern Syria and the lower appearing at auction in 2000 – have recently been digitally reunited and its inscription published by Radner. The composition is similar to that of the Rimah stele, but the material is basalt carved in a rougher provincial style. The stele carries two separate inscriptions. On the front is a text of Adad-nirari reporting his restoration of the temple of the god Salmanu at Dur-Katlimmu, while on the left side is a text of Nergal-ereš stating that he made this image of Adad-nirari and presented it to Salmanu (London, British Museum 131124; Radner 2012).

Six limestone statues of male deities from the time of Adad-nirari III, some of them fragmentary, were found by Rassam in doorways of the Nabû temple at Kalḫu. The two largest examples are eleven feet (340 cm) tall and stood in the returns at both sides of the outer door of the gate chamber leading to the temple's inner courtyard. The two figures are essentially identical: uninscribed, standing with hands folded in front of the waist, and wearing a long fringed robe and crown with single pair of horns. One was found intact and the other in pieces; both are now in the Iraq Museum (Baghdad, Iraq Museum 72132; Rassam 1897: 10; Gadd 1936: 229, plate 7; Oates 1957: 28; Mallowan 1966: I, 260, fig. 196; Strommenger 1970: 20, Taf. 10a–b).

Rassam also found two pairs of life-sized statues of male deities standing in the outer entrance of the antechamber between the inner courtyard and the Nabû sanctuary. One pair stood in the inner corners of the deep returns at both sides of the door, facing outward into the courtyard. They are similar to the colossal examples at the courtyard entrance, except that they are smaller (160 cm tall) and wear a smooth garment, on which an inscription is carved below the waist. The text, which is the same on both statues, praises Nabû who dwells in Kalḫu, and states that these statues were dedicated to Nabû by Bel-

tarši-ilumma, governor of Kalḫu, for the life of Adad-nirari and his mother Sammu-ramat (Semiramis). The text concludes with a warning to trust no other god but Nabû (British Museum 118888, 118889; Rassam 1897: 9–10; Oates 1957: 29; Strommenger 1970: 18–19, Taf. 8–9; Grayson 1996: 226–7).

The other pair of divine statues in this door were five feet (153 cm) tall, uninscribed, wore a plain garment and crown with two pairs of horns, and held a rectangular tray or box. These figures stood in the outer part of each return, facing each other across the threshold, in front of and turned at right angles to the inscribed statues. Rassam described these statues as intact, but they were left in place and by the time they were re-excavated by Mallowan the one to the north had lost its head and only a fragment of the feet of the southern one remained. Both statues apparently made their way to the Mosul Museum, on the evidence of a recently-published photograph of a museum storeroom (Rassam 1897: 10; Gadd 1936: 150, plate 8 facing p. 36; Oates 1957: 29; Mallowan 1966: I, 261–2, fig. 243; Strommenger 1970: 19–20; Brusasco 2016: 242–4, figs. 32–3).

The visitor to Nabû's sanctuary would therefore first pass between the colossal figures at the entrance to the courtyard, and then turning right, pass first by the uninscribed figures holding trays, and immediately thereafter past the inscribed statues into the sanctuary's antechamber. The lower half of a smaller seventh statue, which Mallowan identified as another tray bearer, was found in secondary context in the temple's outer courtyard. Mallowan suggested that it originally stood in the return by the door to NT 7, the antechamber of the Tašmetu sanctuary, which was adjacent to the Nabû sanctuary (Mallowan 1966: I, 261, 263, fig. 196).

The only known sculpture from the reign of Shalmaneser IV is an alabaster stele of the royal official Bel-Ḫarran-bel-u-šur (at least 782–727 BCE), the palace herald (LÚ.NIMGIR) of Shalmaneser IV, found at Tell Abta on the Wadi Tharthar in the desert southwest of Mosul. Carved in fine metropolitan Assyrian style, it shows Bel-Ḫarran-bel-u-šur standing in the traditional pose of the Assyrian king, but beardless and without headgear, with symbols of deities before his face. The text mentions the name of his king, but deals entirely with his own act in founding a city named after himself here in the desert. He also claims to have exempted the city from taxation, traditionally a royal prerogative (Istanbul, Asariatika Müzeleri; Pritchard 1969: no. 453; Grayson 1996: 241).

Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BCE)

The walls of some rooms in Tiglath-pileser III's Central Palace at Kalḫu were

lined with relief slabs, but these had been removed from their original position by Esarhaddon for reuse in his Southwest Palace. They were found by Layard in 1847–49, stacked in the Central Palace in preparation for being moved and in the Southwest Palace, some already on the walls and others lined up on the floor in front of the walls. Further sculptures were uncovered by Rassam and Loftus in 1853–54. The majority of the reliefs were reburied and later reexcavated by the Polish mission in 1974–76 (Layard 1849a: I, 59–61, 375–81; II, 19–37; Barnett and Falkner 1962). Paley digitally published all of the reexcavated reliefs shortly before his untimely death (www.learningsites.com: “Nimrud Central Palace Area”).

Since the slabs were not in their original positions, Layard was unable to trace the walls of the Central Palace to determine how many rooms might have been decorated. In some cases the reliefs were found stacked in the order in which they had been removed by the Assyrian workers who dismantled the palace, and this together with overlaps in the inscription permitted Tadmor to reconstruct parts of at least four, and possibly as many as six, inscribed relief series. Reade identified an additional uninscribed series. Each of these may have decorated a different room (Tadmor 1967: 177–86; Tadmor 1994: 24–5, 238–59; Wäfler 1975: 302–8; Reade 1979b: 72–6).

According to Tiglath-pileser’s building account, his palace decoration included bull and lion colossi and apotropaic figures. In the “West Gate” area of the palace, Meuszynski excavated the lower parts of three bull colossi, which Sobolewski attributed to Tiglath-pileser III. Layard reported winged deities and figures holding maces, but didn’t draw any examples and only a fragment of one survives. Tadmor distinguished three relief groups (C₁, C₂, E) that featured figures of these types, but he felt they all could have come from a single room. Two inscribed fragments in the British Museum from another series (D) show the king and an attendant, and Meuszynski found another inscribed slab with courtiers from the same series. Colossal winged human-headed bulls carved in low relief and colossal wingless humans holding plants were also found. At least two corner slabs carved with two different forms of the stylized tree were excavated: one example is a stylized palm tree, similar to those in Aššurnāširpal’s reliefs, with a palmette-topped trunk framed by a continuous row of palmettes, while one or two other examples had the same central trunk, but it was framed by a row of alternating cones and pomegranates (Layard 1851: 29, 45, 65–6, 71–2; Barnett and Falkner 1962: 25–6, pls. 97–8, 104–7; Tadmor 1994: 172–5; Meuszynski 1976b: 41–2, pls. 12a, 13; Sobolewski 1979: 254–65, figs. 13–14; 1982a: 263–6, figs. 15–16; Bleibtreu 1980: pls. 5b, 6a–b, 7).

Most of the published reliefs, however, including two of Tadmor’s series and Reade’s series, depict military activity. The format of these slabs was the same as that of Aššurnāširpal II: two registers of relief separated by a central register of text. Tadmor distinguished between the two inscribed series of

military reliefs on the basis of the number of lines in the inscription: his “Series A” has seven lines, while “Series B” has twelve. The slabs in Reade’s series have the central strip prepared for an inscription that was never added. This may indicate that the palace was uncompleted at Tiglath-pileser’s death. The subjects of the military reliefs seem to have been drawn from a number of Tiglath-pileser’s campaigns. Series A includes campaigns to the east and west of Assyria, and Series B apparently shows campaigns to the east, west, and north. Reade’s series showed a southern and probably also a western campaign. The inscription in the central register was not a short text repeated on each slab, as with Aššurnāširpal’s “Standard Inscription,” but instead was a long annalistic text that continued from slab to slab, apparently around the entire room (Tadmor 1994). The surviving exemplars of this text, though fragmentary and incomplete, constitute our most detailed source for the events of Tiglath-pileser’s reign. In addition to the register of annalistic text, at least one relief series included brief captions on the images themselves, giving the names of the cities represented.

At least three, and perhaps as many as six, life-sized basalt statues of bearded male deities apparently stood in the poorly-preserved Ištar temple built by Tiglath-pileser III at Ḫadatu (modern Arslan Tash). The figures are uninscribed and the three best-preserved examples were found out of context, but fragments of the beards of two additional statues were found in the Ištar temple, and Thureau-Dangin proposed that all of these figures originally stood there. The only complete example, found in secondary context at the site, is 173 cm high with a separate base 34 cm high (Aleppo, Archaeological Museum). The figure wears a garment fringed at the torso, waist, and feet, a rounded crown with a top-knot and single pair of horns, and holds in front of his waist a rectangular box open at the top. In addition, two very similar headless examples were found in nearby locations, one some 6 kilometers away at Maqtalāh (Louvre, AO 7538) and the other in a private house in Urfa (present location unknown), and a head that may belong to the Urfa example turned up on the art market (Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum; Thureau-Dangin et al. 1931: 10, 55, 66–7, pls. I, XV: 10–11; Strommenger 1970: 21–3, 28, Taf. 10c, 16d–e).

The most complete and best-preserved group of Assyrian wall paintings was found in the palace at the provincial capital of Til Barsib (Thureau-Dangin et al. 1936: 42–74, pls. XLIII–LIII; Tomabechi 1983/1984; Albenda 2005: 33–74), remains of which were uncovered in thirteen rooms (examples in Aleppo Museum and Louvre). They were of three types. First, in most of the painted rooms was a three-register decorative frieze: a central register of circles or lozenges alternating with animals or protective deities sandwiched between two registers of stylized floral motifs. The second type was apotropaic figures: winged humans – sometimes alone, sometimes restraining a bull – and winged human-headed bulls. The third type was narrative scenes, which were placed

below the decorative frieze in six rooms. The narrative subjects were lion hunts (in two bathrooms and the throne room), processions of western tribute bearers and prisoners (in two reception rooms), and a sea battle (in the main gate chamber). None of the paintings can be securely dated, but on the basis of comparisons with dated Assyrian reliefs most scholars divide them into two groups. The earlier group – the sea battle, one of the processions and most of the other – seems to date around the time of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BCE). The later group, which includes the lion hunts, is most similar to the reliefs of Sennacherib (704–681 BCE) and Assurbanipal (668–627 BCE). At the provincial town of Arslan Tash, by contrast, the walls of the throne room suite of the palace were decorated with a simple geometric frieze (Thureau-Dangin et al. 1931).

From Ashur come a glazed plaque possibly of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BCE) decorated with a person before a deity (Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum VA Ass 897) and a section of a glazed brick podium face, also probably from the time of Tiglath-pileser III, that shows chariots and horsemen in the mountains (Andrae 1925: 21–3, 29–31, figs. 4–5, pls. 6, 10). The only known rock relief of Tiglath-pileser III is at Mila Mergi, some 25 kilometers northwest of Dohuk in northern Iraq. The king faces left in the usual pose and the area in front of him is covered with an extensive inscription (Postgate 1973a; Tadmor 1994: 111–16).

Sargon II (721–705 BCE)

In the palace of Sargon II at Dur-Šarrukin (modern Khorsabad), the walls of the two throne rooms, the major reception suites, and the associated courtyard facades were lined with wall reliefs. The sculptures that have been published are mostly from the northwest wing, which was excavated by Paul E. Botta in 1842–44 (Botta and Flandin 1849–50; republished in Albenda 1986).

The relief decoration of Sargon's palace was modeled closely on that of Aššurnasirpal II's palace at Kalḫu. The facade of the principal throne room ("Court" VII) was decorated with five pairs of human-headed bull colossi – one pair in each of the three doors and two antithetically posed pairs on the buttresses between the doors. Between each pair of buttress bulls was a colossal human figure holding a small lion. The same arrangement of figures was used also at the main exterior entrance to the palace, and a similar arrangement – without the figures holding lions – appeared on the facade of the subsidiary throne room. Pairs of human-headed bull colossi were also used in a number of other important doorways in the palace, as well as in the central door of the throne room in Palace F, the arsenal. Like Aššurnasirpal's

colossi, these colossi also have five legs. The colossi were accompanied in some doorways by winged or wingless human figures or by bird-headed human figures, and in smaller doors these types appeared alone. The stylized tree occurred in some doorways and on the corner slabs in rooms decorated with non-historical subjects. Bull colossi also appear in the citadel gates and at least one of the city gates, accompanied by a colossal winged deity holding a cone and bucket (Place and Thomas 1867–70: III, pls. 8–13, 47; Loud and Altman 1938: pls. 9–10, 39, 46).

The space on the courtyard walls that was not occupied by colossi, as well as the decoration of several rooms (6, 10, 11), possibly including the throne room, was devoted to tribute processions. With two exceptions, these processions show a single file of figures the full height of the slab. The exceptions are Room 10, a corridor connecting two courtyards, where two registers of tributaries – westerners above and easterners below – are separated by a band of inscription, and the north corner of the throne-room court, where the subject of the transport of timber by water is shown as if viewed from above, with relatively small figures scattered across the surface of the water-patterned slabs, giving an effective approximation of figures in space. According to Place the subject of the throne room reliefs was a procession of large figures, presumably in a single register, marching toward the king (Place and Thomas 1867–70: I, 51–2). Other subjects that were depicted with large-scale figures in a single register were punishment of captives (Rooms 4 and 8), which were inscribed with a continuous historical text as well as with captions identifying the malefactors, and processions of courtiers before the king (Rooms 9 and 12).

Three other subjects that were used in some rooms were royal military campaigns (Rooms 1, 2, 3, 5, 13, 14), royal hunts (Room 7 and “Monument x”), and royal banquets (Rooms 2, 7). In all of these rooms except “Monument x,” the slab format is two registers of relief separated by a band inscribed with a long annalistic text. As with Tiglath-pileser III’s relief text, this is our most complete written record of Sargon’s military activities. Defeated cities shown in the military reliefs are labeled and some – but not all – of these places are mentioned in the accompanying annals text, so it is usually possible to determine what campaign is being depicted. From this it appears that the military reliefs in each room show only one or two campaigns, and Reade (1976) suggested that the labeled cities mentioned only in the reliefs may be used to augment the annalistic record of Sargon’s reign. In the two rooms that show two subjects (2 and 7), the banquet is in the upper register and the other subject in the lower.

In the throne room, the Chicago expedition found a small trimmed fragment of wall relief with a band of inscription, apparently originally belonging to a slab having two registers of relief with an inscribed band in between. The relief subject is laborers towing a loaded boat in the water. Wilson (1995: 114,

fig. 8) suggested that this slab may have originated in the throne room. If so, then this room would have combined historical reliefs in two registers with procession reliefs in one register.

“Monument x,” which is possibly to be identified with Sargon’s *bū ḫilāni* (which resembled “a Hittite palace”), was decorated with slabs of black limestone carved with a single register of relief, intended to evoke the basalt sculptures of North Syrian palaces. Two sculptures found in the area of the building showed a bird hunt in a forest, and two others had a pair of guardian deities flanking an unusual stylized tree, apparently on a doorjamb. At the other end of the palace in Room 99, one of the small gate chambers connecting the outer court (XV) with the exterior, Place found at least two additional slabs in the same stone lying on the floor. One showed a procession of three foreign tributaries carrying city models and the other an Assyrian courtier who probably led the procession. On the basis of their dimensions and material, he speculated that these were also intended for “Monument x.” Stacked in one corner of Room 99 were three dressed, unsculptured slabs of black stone, and chips of the same material were scattered on the floor, leading Place to suggest that this was the workshop in which these sculptures were carved prior to being moved to “Monument x” (Place and Thomas 1867–70: I, 92–3; III, pl. 48; Albenda 1986: 48, figs. 20, 76–9, pls. 60–2).

The remains of a gypsum throne base, the sides of which were decorated with reliefs, were found at the southeast end of the throne room. The preserved panels depict a royal campaign beside a river and a campaign in the mountains (Baghdad, Iraq Museum; Chicago, Oriental Institute Museum, A 11258; Loud, Frankfort, and Jacobsen 1936: figs. 79–80; Blocher 1994). The earliest securely dated sculptured threshold slabs from Dur-Šarrukin come not from the palace, where thresholds were carved only with a text, but from two of the palatial residences on the citadel, Residences K and L. In both cases the decoration is a floral pattern, augmented in Residence L with an inscription of Sîn-aḫū-ušur, Sargon’s brother and vizier (Loud and Altman 1938: pls. 30, 36, 48, 66; Albenda 1978: pls. 2–5).

The ceilings of several rooms in Sargon’s palace were painted with geometric patterns, and brick fragments decorated with inscriptions and non-narrative subjects were found at unspecified locations (Loud, Frankfort, and Jacobsen 1936: 67–71, fig. 82, pls. II–III; Reade 1995; Albenda 2005: 21–5). Painted on the wall opposite the main entrance to the great hall of Residence K were friezes of animal, floral, protective, and geometric motifs, above which was a single panel preserved to a height of nearly 10 meters showing Sargon and a courtier facing a deity on a dais (Loud and Altman 1938: pls. 88–91). The curved part of the arches of several of the city gates was faced with a band of bricks decorated with winged genies and rosettes (Place and Thomas 1867–70: I, 174–5; III, pls. 10–11, 14–17).

The entrances to the three major palace temples of Šamaš, Sîn, and Ningal, as

well as the entrances to the central court and principal shrine in the Nabû temple, were flanked by glazed brick dados decorated with symbolic animals and objects. Place also found fragments of embossed bronze bands, probably from door leaves, in the Adad temple and bronze sheets embossed with a scale pattern covering poles at each side of the entrance to the Šîn temple. The Chicago expedition found similar examples in the nearby Šamaš temple and in the Nabû temple. Nearly all of these were decorated with groups of mythological figures (Place and Thomas 1867–70: I, 125–7, 135, III, pls. 24–31, 72–3; Loud, Frankfort, and Jacobsen 1936: 92–8, 102–7, 109–13; Loud and Altman 1938: 41–4, 58–9, 61, pls. 17, 21, 49–50, 83; Wilson 1995: fig. 9).

In addition, eight pairs of virtually identical alabaster statues of bearded male deities stood by eight major doorways in these temples. The figures, which are so similar that they must have been produced as a series, are slightly under life size (ca. 160 cm tall) and wear a long plain garment, belted at the waist and fringed at the bottom, and a horned cylindrical crown that broadens at the top to form a shallow square basin. In front of the waist they hold a flowing vase. Four pairs of these figures stood in the palace temple complex: three pairs before the principal shrines of Šamaš, Šîn, and Ningal, and the fourth in front of Room 191, a small room of unknown function (Baghdad, Iraq Museum 25963, IM 25964; Strommenger 1970: 23–4, Taf. 11–14; Place and Thomas 1867–70: I, 122–7, 135; III, pls. 6, 24, 31bis; Loud, Frankfort, and Jacobsen 1936: 98, 107, 113, figs. 98, 107, 108, 111, 112, 115, 116, 118; Loud and Altman 1938: pl. 48.7). Major entrances in the nearby Nabû temple were flanked by four more pairs, three of which marked the succession of doorways one must pass through to get from the outside to the Nabû sanctuary, and the fourth at the entrance to a secondary shrine whose god has not been identified (Chicago, Oriental Institute 11808, 11809; Loud and Altman 1938: 45, 58–9, 61, 95, pls. 16E, 17C, 17F, 45, 47, 79). To summarize, the entrances to Sargon's major temples were flanked by a pair of dados decorated in glazed brick with symbolic figures, a pair of standards covered with copper sheathing embossed with mythical figures, and a pair of statues of deities holding the flowing vase (Place and Thomas 1867–70: III, pl. 24).

Two well preserved relief steles of Sargon II are known: One is from Najafehabad in western Iran (Tehran, Archaeological Museum; Levine 1972). The other does not come from controlled excavations, but it is documented in several contemporary sources as having been found in 1844 at Kition, within the area of modern Larnaca, and its inscription confirms that it was erected in Cyprus (Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum VA 968; Yon and Malbran-Labat 1995). On both steles the king stands in the usual pose – facing left at Najafehabad and right at Kition – with divine symbols in front of his face.

Sennacherib (704–681 BCE)

The most extensive known group of Neo-Assyrian sculptures was in Sennacherib's Southwest Palace at Nineveh, excavated by Layard between 1847 and 1851. All told, Layard estimated he uncovered 9880 feet (3011 meters) of wall reliefs in the palace. A few of these date to the reign of Assurbanipal and perhaps one of his successors, but most are Sennacherib's. As in the palaces of Aššurnāṣirpal II and Sargon II, only rooms in or around major reception suites were decorated with wall reliefs, but the number of such rooms in Sennacherib's palace was considerably larger – nearly seventy. The palace had been thoroughly burned at the fall of Nineveh in 612 BCE, and most of the slabs were badly cracked and scarred by the heat. In the mid-1960s, the throne-room suite was re-excavated by the Iraq State Organization for Antiquities and Heritage and roofed over as a site museum where some 100 reliefs were displayed in their original position until this part of the palace was destroyed by ISIS in April–May 2016 (Layard 1849a, 1853a; Madhloom and Mahdi 1976; Russell 1995, 1998a). The fullest general studies of the palace are Russell (1991) and Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner (1998), which should be consulted for illustrations of the reliefs discussed here.

The arrangement of reliefs on the throne-room facade (H) of Sennacherib's palace was the same as that of Sargon II: a pair of human-headed bull colossi in each of the three exterior doors and addorsed pairs of bull colossi – between which were lion-clutching humans – on the two buttresses between the doors. An interesting innovation is that these colossi have only four legs, which gives them a more naturalistic appearance than that of their five-legged predecessors. A similar arrangement of colossal figures was reported for the poorly-recorded west facade of the palace and bull colossi also occurred in a number of other major palace doorways. A well-preserved example was found in the Nergal Gate on the north stretch of the city wall, and was on display in the restored gate until it was destroyed by ISIS in May–June 2016. The jambs of smaller doorways were carved with a variety of apotropaic figures. Some of these had not occurred in the relief decoration of previous palaces, although clay figurines of the same types had been buried under the floor of Sargon's palace. Threshold slabs in the doorways were carved with floral patterns, occasionally augmented with a brief inscription (Albenda 1978: pls. 8–15; Russell 1991: 179–87, figs. 10, 26, 48; 1995; 1999a: 128–33).

Only two of Sargon's narrative subjects reappear in Sennacherib's palace: military campaigns, which were the subject in all but three of the thirty-eight rooms for which the subject is known, and procurement of palace building materials: the quarrying and transportation overland of human-headed bull gateway colossi on two walls in Court VI (with military scenes on the other two walls) and the transportation by water of a very large piece of wood or stone in Room XLIX. Processions of attendants and horses going in and out of the palace were depicted on the walls of Room LI, a corridor that probably led

to a postern gate, and deportation of captives was apparently the subject of Room XLIII.

Sennacherib began construction on his palace early in his reign and at the time his wall reliefs were carved his artists had only the first few campaigns to choose from as subjects. In consequence, most of his military reliefs can apparently be associated with his first three campaigns – to Babylonia, to the Zagros mountains, and to the Levant. The fifth campaign to Mount Nipur in the north was probably the subject on the west wall of the throne room (Room I), and this as well as the fourth campaign to Babylonia could be the subjects of some of the unlabeled reliefs in other rooms (Frahm 1997: 124–5). With only three known exceptions (Room I, Courts VI and LXIV), each room was decorated with only a single campaign or subject.

The format of Sennacherib's wall reliefs is different from that of his predecessors. Sennacherib omitted the band of inscription that divided the previous kings' slabs into two narrow registers and carved his relief images over the entire surface. On this expanded pictorial area, Sennacherib's artists adopted the spatial conventions of Sargon's timber transport reliefs: a high implied viewpoint with relatively small-scale figures more-or-less freely disposed across the slab. The sense of depth is most effective for subjects depicted against a patterned background – mountains or water. When the subject does not permit such a setting, for example in reliefs that show the Babylonian plain, the slab is divided into registers by multiple ground lines or by narrow uninscribed margins. The only texts that intrude on any of Sennacherib's reliefs are brief captions inscribed next to the king or the cities he encounters (Russell 1999a: 283–92).

Renovation work in the area of the Nebi Yunus mosque in the 1970s exposed a series of wall slabs carved with a procession of grooms leading horses. These slabs are very similar to examples in Sennacherib's palace in a descending passageway that apparently led to the outside (Layard 1853b: pl. 7; Smith 1938: pls. 66–7). The presence of some inscribed Sennacherib horse troughs nearby suggests that the Nebi Yunus reliefs may have lined a similar passageway, and may represent one of Sennacherib's contributions to the arsenal (Scott and MacGinnis 1990: 70, 72, pl. 13b). Painted bricks from the seventh century BCE have been found in the area of the west facade of Sennacherib's palace (Russell 1999b) and in the Nineveh arsenal (unpublished). At Ashur, a unique large square cult basin of Sennacherib from the Assur temple is decorated with images of gods with flowing vases in high relief at the corners and in the center of the sides, each flanked by a pair of fish-men in lower relief (Andrae 1977: Abb. 16).

In addition to the reliefs in his palace, Sennacherib was also responsible for rock reliefs at Bavian (actually nearby Khinnis), and probably also those at Faida and Maltai (Bachmann 1927; Jacobsen and Lloyd 1935; Boehmer 1975; Reade 1978, 1987–90; Börker-Klähn 1982: Nr. 186–201, 207–10). All of

these reliefs are located in the hills north of Nineveh. The examples at Bavian and Faida were definitely associated with aqueducts, and Reade has suggested the ones at Maltai may have been as well. At Bavian, at the point where water was diverted into the canal, was a large stone block (now broken), sculpted on the lower part of its wider face with a pair of human-headed bull colossi flanking a human figure holding a lion and on the upper part with a profile image of the king flanked by two deities standing on sacred animals. On the narrow face was a god flanked by two images of the king, all shown frontally. On the rock face just south of the canal head is a large relief that showed two gods flanked by two images of the king. Some 30 meters southwest of this is the “Rider relief,” which apparently originally showed two images of the king framing a group of gods standing on animals, but was later recarved with a horseman (probably Sasanian). The rock reliefs at Maltai, and apparently those at Faida, also show images of the king facing a group of gods standing on animals, and a fragmentary stele probably from Ashur shows Sennacherib standing before a pair of gods (Istanbul, Asariatika Müzeleri; Donbaz and Galter 1985).

Sennacherib is shown alone, standing in the usual pose with symbols of deities before his face, on six rock reliefs in the Judi Dagħ region north of Cizre in Turkey, on 11 of the rock reliefs at Bavian, and on one probably to be attributed to Sennacherib in the Wadi Bahandawaya near al-Kosh in northern Iraq (King 1913; Börker-Klähn 1982: Nr. 180–5, 202), as well as on three limestone slab steles from Nineveh that apparently marked the course of a royal road (London, British Museum 124800; Istanbul, Asariatika Müzeleri; Paterson 1912–13: pls. 3–4; Mosul Museum; Al-Mutewely 1999–2000; Brusasco 2016: 217–20, fig. 10).

Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE)

Layard’s excavations at Esarhaddon’s Southwest Palace at Kalḫu revealed wall slabs that had been removed from the Northwest and Central palaces and placed against the walls of the Southwest Palace in preparation for reuse, but the project was abandoned before any of the slabs had been recarved. The only recorded Esarhaddon reliefs from the palace were human-headed bull and lion colossi in Doors a, b, c, and f. The head of one of these colossi from Door c was taken to London (British Museum 118893). Layard described them as being four-legged and carved in coarse limestone, instead of the alabaster of their predecessors. Also unlike earlier colossi, the empty spaces between the head and wing at the top, and behind the tail at the back, were carved with at least six small apotropaic figures. Layard described these figures and drew the examples from one bull in Door b. It appears that most of the figures are Sennacherib types, with the exception of a unique “dragon with

the head of an eagle and the claws of a bird” (Layard 1849a: I, 348–9; Barnett and Falkner 1962: 20–30, pls. 108, 112–13; Reade 1979a: 40, Taf. 6; Russell 1999a: 147–51, 293–4; Leichty 2011: 166–8).

Wall paintings from the Kalḥu arsenal that show processions, and bricks painted with battle scenes from the southeast corner of the Kalḥu citadel date to the time of a later Assyrian king, perhaps Esarhaddon (Mallowan 1966: II, 379–80, figs. 307–8; Layard 1853b: pls. 53–4). Geometric wall paintings of uncertain date were also found in the Governor’s Palace, the Burnt Palace, and the “1950 building” (Mallowan 1950: 164–9, 174, 182, pl. XXX; 1954: 81; 1966: I, 40–1, 207).

On the mound of Nebi Yunus at Nineveh, excavations by the Iraq State Organization for Antiquities and Heritage in a large courtyard of the arsenal revealed a monumental facade decorated with a pair of addorsed bull colossi with a lion-clutching human in between and several doorways lined with bull colossi. Uniquely, some of these colossi are composed of relatively small blocks of stone tightly fitted together prior to being carved. The bulls have four instead of five legs and so must date to Sennacherib or later. Some are unfinished. In the spaces between the bulls were winged deities, some of which carry an Esarhaddon text on the backs of the slabs, and the bulls may date to his reign as well (Musa 1987–88; Black 1987; Scott and MacGinnis 1990: 71, pl. XIIIa; Russell 1999a: 144–6).

At least one of the six Assyrian rock reliefs by the Nahr el-Kalb, 12 kilometers north of Beirut, belongs to Esarhaddon, who is depicted in the usual manner but with the addition of some object held to the nose by the left hand. The attribution of the other reliefs here is uncertain (Börker-Klähn 1982: Nr. 211–16). Two slab steles of basalt from Til-Barsip (Aleppo, National Museum 31, 47) and another of dolerite from Zincirli (Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum VA 2708) all show a new variant of the traditional type: Esarhaddon stands in the usual pose with images of gods before his face, but in addition to the mace, his left hand holds ropes attached to rings in the lips of a pair of small kneeling captives. Esarhaddon’s sons are carved on the narrow sides of all three steles – Assurbanipal on the right side and Šamaš-šumu-ukin on the left (Thureau-Dangin and Dunand 1936: II, pls. 12–13; Pritchard 1969: no. 447–9; Börker-Klähn 1982: Nr. 217–19).

Assurbanipal (668–631 BCE)

The wall slabs of Room XXXIII in the Southwest Palace at Nineveh were of an attractive fossiliferous limestone imported by Sennacherib from the mountains to the north of Assyria, and he may have purposefully left them uncarved, as were the slabs of the same stone in two neighboring rooms. Assurbanipal carved (or recarved) the slabs in this room with scenes of his

own successes in battle. According to the captions inscribed on these sculptures, the slabs to the west of the entrance record Assurbanipal's victory at Til-Tuba in Elam, while those to the east show a procession before the king at the city of Arbela on the upper half, and a scene of homage outside the moated city of Madaktu in Elam on the lower half. The compositions are generally organized by ground lines into registers, but at the right end of the Til-Tuba episode, as the battle degenerates into a rout, this rigid system of organization is replaced by dead and dying enemy soldiers scattered chaotically across the relief surface. On the basis of the cities labeled by the captions, these reliefs should be dated earlier than Assurbanipal's reliefs in the North Palace (London, British Museum 124801, 124802; Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998: 94–100, pls. 286–320; Russell 1999a: 166–81).

The largest group of Assurbanipal reliefs was in the crown prince's palace – commonly called the North Palace – at Nineveh. Excavations by Rassam (1853–54) and Loftus (1854–55) exposed the central part of the structure: the throne-room suite with parts of its inner and outer courtyards, a few additional rooms around the inner court, and a system of hallways that communicated with the outside, all of which were lined with wall reliefs. The excavation history and surviving sculptures from the palace have been thoroughly published by Barnett (1976), which should be consulted for illustrations of the sculptures referred to here.

Human-headed bull colossi were not used anywhere in the known part of the North Palace. Instead, the throne-room facade was decorated with plain stone slabs and the jambs of its center door were carved with apotropaic figures. The threshold slab was carved with a floral pattern. Apotropaic jamb figures, mostly types already seen in Sennacherib's palace, and floral thresholds also decorated other doorways throughout the palace (Albenda 1978: pls. 16–26). The reliefs in the throne room (M) displayed a selection of Assurbanipal's military campaigns to several different regions. The rooms behind the throne room were also decorated with military subjects, but the subject in each of these rooms was apparently only a single campaign. A group of passageways that led from the throne-room area to the palace exterior was lined with reliefs that feature hunt-related subjects: processions to and from a lion hunt, tame lions, and the king hunting lions, gazelles, and wild horses. A number of reliefs that had fallen into some of these passages from an upper story show lion hunts, military campaigns, and Assurbanipal and his queen dining in a garden (Figure 24.9).



Figure 24.9 Nineveh, wall relief showing the king and queen banqueting in a garden, North Palace of Assurbanipal, found fallen into Room S from an upper story, calcareous gypsum, W: 140 cm, London, British Museum 124920.

Source: author.

In general, the military reliefs are arranged in two registers and the hunting reliefs in one, but there are exceptions. Registers are often further subdivided by continuous ground lines. In compositions having multiple registers, the registers are separated by a narrow uninscribed band of stone. The only inscriptions on the reliefs are captions placed next to the part of the image they label (Russell 1999a: 154–208). In most of the North Palace compositions, figures adhere fairly firmly to the ground lines, though occasionally, particularly in the hunting scenes, they are arranged more freely across the relief surface.

In the Southwest Palace at Nineveh, the wall slabs in two areas were carved with Babylonian campaign subjects that seem to date to Assurbanipal or one of his successors: in Court XIX the king and army campaign beside a wide river that divides the slabs into two registers, with an effect similar to that of the central text register of Sennacherib's predecessors, and in Room XXVIII the Assyrian army hunts out enemy refugees in a swamp. A number of details indicate that these reliefs postdate Sennacherib, while they are very similar to, though differing in a few details from, the North Palace reliefs of Assurbanipal. At least some of the reliefs in Room XXII, which show lush scenes of the countryside around Nineveh, also postdate Sennacherib (Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998: 80–90, pls. 187–265; Falkner 1952–53: 247–9; Hrouda 1965a: 115–17; Nagel 1967: 31–9; Porada 1989: 233–43; Russell 1991: 117–51).

The Neo-Assyrian Period: Portable Arts

Seals

While palace reliefs represent a new medium in the Neo-Assyrian period, the cylinder seals draw on over two millennia of artistic tradition that was readily accessible through old seals passed down or unearthed. Hundreds of Neo-Assyrian cylinder seals are preserved, deriving from excavations in the Assyrian heartland and provinces, as well as from the art market. The largest published groups of excavated seals are from Ashur, now in Berlin, and from Kalḫu and Nineveh, now in London (Moortgat 1966; Jakob-Rost and Gerlach 1997; Collon 2001; Klengel-Brandt 2014). Herbordt (1998–2001) provides a valuable overview of materials, styles, and subjects, and is the basis for the summary here.

Early typologies were based on carving technique and defined four stylistic groups: (1) linear style, characterized by grooved contours and fill patterns cut with a chisel, (2) drilled style, where the principal forms of the subject are created with drill holes, (3) cut style, combining drill holes with lines made by a cutting wheel and filing, and (4) modeled style, where tool marks are blended and smoothed to create naturalistic figures (Herbordt 1998–2001: 267–8). In fact, these “styles” are actually technological responses to the hardness of the material being carved. The linear style is associated with soft stones and faience, which can be engraved with edged tools, while the drilled, cut, and modeled styles are found on hard stones that are carved with the aid of mechanical tools and abrasives (Collon 2001: 20–1). These styles have only the most general chronological significance.

The dating of Neo-Assyrian cylinder seals is complicated by the lack of sealed tablets prior to the end of the ninth century BCE and by the fact that most Neo-Assyrian seals are not inscribed. Certain subjects in the linear style, such as the king with bow and bowl pouring a libation and figures flanking a sacred tree under a winged disk, are assigned to the ninth century on the basis of parallels with the Kalḫu palace reliefs. Further evidence that the linear style was current in the ninth century is provided by the presence of linear style seals in level IVB at Hasanlu, Iran, which was destroyed around 800 BCE (Marcus 1996: xxvii, 43–4, 114–18, plates 18–19). Impressions of linear style seals are rarely found on seventh century tablets, indicating that these seals were no longer used at that time. However, seals in the drilled, cut, and modeled styles were used throughout the Neo-Assyrian period (Herbordt 1998–2001: 265–7).

Herbordt prefers to categorize Neo-Assyrian seals on the basis of subject (1998–2001: 268; for a similar approach and many illustrations, see Collon 2001). She observes that the seal subjects fall into two general categories, ritual scenes and hunting scenes, and that within these categories it is possible

to detect chronological trends.

One of the earliest types of ritual subjects, evidently inspired by ninth century palace reliefs and appearing mainly on linear style seals of the ninth to eighth centuries, shows the king pouring a libation, either standing holding a bow or seated. He faces an offering table, on the other side of which stands a courtier holding a fan. As on the reliefs in Rooms G and H in the Northwest Palace at Kalḫu, these images presumably express the king's roles of high priest and military leader (Moortgat 1966: nos. 660, 665, 668–72; Collon 2001: nos. 104–25). A related subject appears somewhat later on drilled/cut/modeled hard stone seals from the late ninth through mid-eighth centuries. These show a worshipper facing a standing god or gods, who usually stand on or with their identifying attributes. Some of these seals are carved with an inscription identifying the owner as an officer or *limmu*-official. It is intriguing that although these high officials owe their positions to the king, they show themselves receiving their authority directly from the gods (Moortgat 1966: nos. 595–600; Collon 1988: 77, nos. 342–4, 554; 2001: nos. 235–56; Herbordt 1998–2001: 267–9).

Two ritual subjects were used throughout the three centuries of Neo-Assyrian rule. One of these, again probably inspired by ninth century palace reliefs, shows two worshippers and/or composite figures flanking a stylized tree, usually with a winged disk above. In ninth century examples, these are usually winged bird-headed anthromorphic figures, while in the seventh century they are more likely to be fish-cloaked figures or bull men who stand to either side of the tree and support a winged disk with their upraised arms (Moortgat 1966: nos. 606, 673, 675, 677–8, 749; Collon 2001: nos. 151–63, 173–82). The other long-lasting ritual subject is a worshipper standing before an enthroned deity, usually a goddess, with an offering table or incense stand between them. By the seventh century, the figure of the deity in these scenes has often been replaced with its divine symbol, and this is also a favorite subject of seventh century stamp seals (Moortgat 1966: nos. 654, 655, 659; Collon 2001: nos. 125–6, 129, 133–47, 168–71, 225–9, 233, 257–9, 269–84, 389–92; Herbordt 1998–2001: 268–9).

In the category of battle and hunting scenes, one of the early subjects is contests between animals or hybrids, with no humans present, presumably inspired by Middle Assyrian glyptic. This subject is common in the linear style, but rare in dated impressions of the eighth to seventh centuries (Moortgat 1966: nos. 647, 649–51; Collon 2001: nos. 54–81). A related subject, which is first attested in the mid-eighth century and becomes the most popular contest subject during the latter part of the empire, is a heraldic composition showing a genius subduing two animals or hybrid creatures. The only animal not shown in these scenes is the lion, as combat with lions is reserved for the king (Moortgat 1966: no. 733; Collon 2001: nos. 324–86; Herbordt 1998–2001: 269).

Two subjects that occur in both the linear and drilled/cut/ modeled styles and run throughout the Neo-Assyrian period are a figure with mace or scimitar fighting an animal or hybrid creature, and an archer – kneeling (mainly on stone seals) or standing (mainly on faience seals) – aiming at an animal or hybrid (Moortgat 1966: nos. 639–45, 696–700; Collon 2001: nos. 14–37, 47–53, 294–323). A very common and highly standardized version of the latter subject shows a standing archer fighting a horned serpent-dragon. This variant occurs exclusively in faience, is so standardized as to appear mass-produced, and is found throughout the empire during all of the Neo-Assyrian period (Moortgat 1966: nos. 689–93; Collon 2001: nos. 41–3; Herbordt 1998–2001: 269).

Although stamp seals are not common in the ninth century, the apparent prestige attached to the type is attested by its use for the Assyrian royal seal from the time of Shalmaneser III through to the end of the empire. With minor variations, the motif remained the same throughout the entire period: framed by a border of a guilloche or dots, the king grasps a rampant lion by its mane while stabbing it with a sword. By the middle of the eighth century stamp seals were in use simultaneously with cylinder seals, and by the seventh century stamp seals predominate on both tablets and closures (Herbordt 1992: Taf. 34–6; 1998–2001: 267, 270–1, Abb. 6–7; Jakob-Rost and Gerlach 1997: 64–103).

Some common cylinder seal subjects also occur on stamp seals, for example scenes with a stylized tree, which, in addition to the usual genies or worshippers, often feature bull men who stand to either side of the tree and support a winged disk with their upraised arms. Other subjects found on both cylinder and stamp seals include a worshipper in front of an enthroned deity, and a worshipper in front of symbols. The latter is attested on tablets from the time of Sargon II onward, and includes the lunar crescent standard, a deity in a lunar crescent, the lightning bolt, and the stylus of Nabû, sometimes beside the spade of Marduk (Herbordt 1992: Taf. 13, 14; 1998–2001: 269–70).

Other common cylinder seal subjects, however, are relatively rarely represented on stamp seals. These include combats, which account for about half of Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal images, and the wide range of gods, genies, and composite creatures represented on Neo-Assyrian cylinder seals.

Conversely, some subjects that rarely appear in cylinder seals are common in stamp seals. For example, the dominant subject in Neo-Assyrian stamp seals is symbols of astral deities, shown either individually or combined, including the winged sun, crescent moon, star of Ištar, and the seven stars. Nearly as common are representations of animals, primarily cattle, goats, and birds, either individually or in antithetical pairs. Subjects that first appear in Neo-Assyrian stamp seals and then carry into the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods include a hero fighting an upright ox, an ox underneath symbols, and two birds flanking a conical symbol (Herbordt 1992: Taf. 10–12,

15–17; 1998–2001: 269–70).

Stamp seals of officials may be identified on the basis of where they were used – on clay sealings in the Southwest Palace at Nineveh – as well as their high quality and the presence of a border in the form of a guilloche or dots, similar to the border on the royal seal. Subjects include motifs that do not appear on private seals, such as an ear of grain and a ziggurat. Of particular interest is the motif of the scorpion, which is associated with the queen and her household. Other subjects express status by including an image of the king, either with an official and rearing horse or stag, or together with the queen facing a deity, with a scorpion in the field above (Herbordt 1992: Taf. 20, 32:3–5, 33; 1998–2001: 271).

Ivories

Huge numbers of carved ivory inlays and ornaments have been excavated at Kalḫu, and lesser numbers occur at most other major Assyrian sites. The great majority of these objects are carved in Levantine styles, evidently brought to Assyria as booty and tribute, and are beyond the scope of this chapter. A minority, however, are clearly carved in what Herrmann terms the Assyrian “tradition,” characterized by subjects and forms similar to those on the palace reliefs, incised in a linear technique on thin plaques of ivory that must originally have been inlaid into wooden furniture (Mallowan and Davies 1970: 1–8; Herrmann 1997). While the Levantine ivories were found concentrated in storage areas, indicating that the imported furniture they adorned was warehoused, the Assyrian ivories were mostly found in the contexts in which they were used. For example, ivory plaques incised with scenes of tribute and military campaigns were found in Aššurnaširpal’s throne room (B), paralleling the subjects on the wall reliefs in that room. The horizontal and vertical formats of these plaques would have been appropriate as inlays for a throne, which would then have expressed the same message of power as did the surrounding reliefs. Similarly, both the reliefs and ivories from the outer courtyard (E) depict the delivery of tribute. Even in cases where Assyrian ivories were found in rooms that lacked wall decoration, such as the Nabû temple and Fort Shalmaneser, it was clear from the architecture that these were administrative or ceremonial spaces, which served as the primary use context for the inlaid furniture. Such parallels led Herrmann to suggest that the decorative program of major public spaces was not confined solely to the wall reliefs, but extended to the furniture as well.

Jewelry and personal accessories

From 1988 to 1990, excavations at Kalḫu by the Iraq State Organization for Antiquities and Heritage under the direction of Muzahim Mahmud Hussein uncovered four intact vaulted brick tombs beneath the floors of rooms in the domestic wing of the palace of Aššurnāṣirpal II (Damerji 1999: Abb 7; Curtis et al. 2008: plans 4b, 5). Three of the tombs contained large quantities of gold jewelry and personal accessories of unparalleled workmanship, and two of these included inscriptions identifying their original occupants as Assyrian queens. Unfortunately, the news of these major discoveries was soon overshadowed by the Iraq–Kuwait crisis of 1990, and after little more than a year on display in the Iraq Museum, the jewelry was placed in storage and has remained inaccessible for viewing or study. Although a general description of the contents of each tomb is available, the objects they contained have not been fully published nor analyzed for technical and stylistic characteristics that might point to their places of origin. In consequence, while we may admire photographs of selected objects, we do not yet understand the stylistic range of the entire corpus from each tomb or what these objects tell us about the social and political interactions of their time.

Many of the objects from the tombs were published photographically in Hussein and Suleiman (2000), which however suffers from poor reproduction quality and is hard to find. A small selection of the most striking pieces were published in high-quality illustrations in Damerji (1999). A summary of the finds is Oates and Oates (2001: 78–89), with further specialized studies on some categories of finds in Curtis et al. (2008). Hussein et al. (2016) provides excellent photos and short descriptions of most of the artifacts from the tombs.

Only a general description of each tomb will be given here. For convenience of reference, the excavators numbered the tombs I to IV, based on the sequence of their discovery. All four were constructed of baked bricks and had the same general layout: an entrance shaft led to an antechamber connected to a vaulted burial chamber ([Figure 24.10](#)). This is the standard layout for Neo-Assyrian intramural vaulted tombs – dozens of similar examples were excavated beneath the floors of Neo-Assyrian houses at Ashur (Haller 1954: 97–169). These tombs are designed so that they can easily be reopened to add new burials, and many of the examples at Ashur were evidently family tombs, containing multiple individuals.



Figure 24.10 Kalḫu (modern Nimrud), Northwest Palace, Tomb II, view of entrance in 1989.

Source: author.

Here the tombs are discussed in order of increasing complexity of the burials they contained. Tomb IV was in the innermost room in a small, self-contained

residential suite (rooms 71–2) located just inside the south entrance of the palace (Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 129–33, pics. 201–22; Hussein 2008: 83–7; Oates and Oates 2001: plan, fig. 33; Curtis et al. 2008: plans 4b, 5). Unlike the other three tombs, it was built of uninscribed bricks with no traces of asphalt to suggest reused bricks. The preserved remains and grave goods seemed to belong to a single individual. The body, which had apparently disintegrated except for the teeth, was in a terracotta coffin in the vaulted burial chamber. There was less gold jewelry in this tomb than in the other three tombs, but it did contain luxurious grave goods that appeared to be undisturbed. The objects in the coffin included two stone stamp seals in gold settings, an earring and elaborate finger ring of gold, and four silver fibulae, all located in the positions where they would have been worn, as well as a copper mirror, silver eye-pencil(?), and three elaborately-decorated silver bowls. Vessels of pottery, copper, and stone were placed on the floor beside the head end of the coffin, as well as in wall niches at both ends of the burial chamber. A glazed pottery figurine of a bearded horseman, apparently found in the coffin, may indicate that the deceased was male and may therefore explain the absence of large quantities of gold jewelry, which was associated with females in the other tombs.

Tomb I was beneath the floor at the north end of room MM, a large inner room at the east side of the domestic wing (Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 95–100, pics. 1–18; Damerji 2008: 81; Curtis et al. 2008: plans 4b, 5). Inscribed bricks of Aššurnaširpal II and Shalmaneser III were built into its brickwork, and the excavator believed these had been reused (Shalmaneser III: Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 96; Aššurnaširpal II: Hararak 1990: 7; and personal observation). The vaulted chamber of this tomb contained a single burial, a woman in her early fifties, interred in a terracotta coffin together with vessels of copper and silver and large quantities of gold jewelry found in the positions where they would have been worn on the body. In the antechamber was a second terracotta sarcophagus containing the body of a second female, also around fifty years old, but no grave goods. It seems likely that this body represents a later reuse of the tomb. There was no inscription to suggest the identity of either individual.

Tomb II, by contrast, included objects inscribed with the names of three queens, but contained only two bodies (Damerji 1999; Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 101–11; Damerji 2008: 81–2; Curtis et al. 2008: plans 4b, 5). It nearly filled the space beneath the floor of room 49, a small room located just south of the king's residential suite (rooms S and X). The masonry incorporated Shalmaneser III inscribed bricks, sometimes coated with bitumen on the faces and ends, perhaps indicating that they had been reused (personal observation). A niche in the wall of the antechamber held a stone tablet that identified the owner as Yaba, queen of Tiglath-pileser III, and placed curses of eternal thirst and restlessness upon anyone who disturbed her burial or placed another body

with hers. Inscribed objects in the burial chamber belonged to Yaba, as well as two other queens: Banitu, queen of a king Shalmaneser, and Atalia, queen of Sargon II. Banitu's husband is usually identified with Shalmaneser V, but the inscriptions include no royal genealogy, so he could be the fourth or even third king of that name (Tracy Spurrier, personal communication). It has also been suggested that "Banitu" was the Akkadian version of the West Semitic name "Yaba" and that both names referred to the same queen (see below).

The monolithic stone sarcophagus in the burial chamber contained the remains of two women, one above the other, both of whom died in their early thirties. The greater degree of bone deterioration in the lower individual indicated that she had been buried twenty to fifty years before her companion. The bones of the upper individual showed evidence of having been heated to 150–250 ° C for several hours, an otherwise unattested treatment that suggests that she had died away from home and her body was then dried to preserve it for transport (Müller-Karpe, Kunter, and Schultz 2008: 143–4). The lower woman should be the original occupant, presumably Yaba, while the upper woman was probably Atalia, based on a gold bowl engraved with that name placed on her chest. The objects engraved with Banitu's name would then either have been inherited by Atalia from her predecessor, or as Dalley has proposed, they actually belonged to Yaba, who may have changed her name to Banitu after the death of Tiglath-pileser III (Dalley 2008). The bodies were accompanied by 14 kg of lavish gold jewelry and accessories, some of them quite massive, including armbands, anklets, diadems, earrings, finger rings, mirrors, and vessels. Much of the jewelry was inlaid with glass and semi-precious stones, including a surprising abundance of banded agate. An elaborately decorated gold bowl from the tomb appears to have originated in the southern Levant in the 10th century BCE, based on its stylistic and iconographic parallels (Wicke 2010).

Tomb III was beneath the floor of room 57, directly south of, and adjacent to, room 49 (Damerji 1999; Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 113–28; Damerji 2008: 82; Curtis et al. 2008: plans 4b, 5). The occupants of this tomb present mysteries of a different sort. Inscriptions on a stone tablet in a niche in the antechamber, on the stone doors between the antechamber and burial chamber, and on the lid of the monolithic coffin in the burial chamber all identified the tomb owner as Mulissu-mukannišat-Ninua, queen of Aššurnāširpal II and Shalmaneser III, and cursed anyone who disturbed her burial or placed anyone else in her tomb. The masonry of the vault included bricks stamped with Shalmaneser's Kalḫu ziggurat text, which is consistent with the inclusion of his name in the stone inscriptions (Fadhil 1990: 471–9; Damerji 1999: 8–11). If the queen ever was in fact buried here, all that remained was a fragment of bone and a stone bead, the burial chamber having been emptied out by looters who entered by making a hole in the roof of the vault. At some point after the original burial, a second course of baked brick

was laid on top of the original pavement in the antechamber, blocking the burial chamber doors (Damerji 1999: 9). The antechamber then effectively became a separate tomb in which were placed three bronze coffins, two side by side on the floor with their rounded ends facing north toward the burial chamber, and a third stacked on top of the eastern lower coffin, with its rounded end facing south toward the outer entrance.

These bronze coffins contained the partial remains of at least thirteen individuals, but in only one case was the skeleton relatively complete, with the others being represented by only a few bones for each. Müller-Karpe, Kunter, and Schultz observe that a primary burial in a bronze coffin should be almost complete, as the one skeleton in fact is, and that the others must therefore be secondary burials. Furthermore, the condition of the bones that have copper staining indicates that some were originally interred in bronze coffins (but not necessarily these same coffins), while others were only placed in the bronze coffins after they had deteriorated considerably in a non-bronze environment (Müller-Karpe, Kunter, and Schultz 2008: 144–6). The bronze coffins also contained a variety of spectacular grave goods, including 23 kg of gold and silver objects.

Bronze coffin 1, the upper coffin, was the smallest of the three (130 cm long). It contained a few bones each from an adult, possibly female, in her twenties and five children ranging in age from premature infant to eleven years. It also contained a large amount of gold jewelry – including headbands, child-sized bracelets, and anklets – located in positions consistent with being worn on a body placed with the head to the north, at the rectangular end. The best preserved skeleton in this coffin belonged to a child around eight to eleven years old, an age consistent with the small size of the coffin. It is possible that this child was the primary burial, or at least was relatively intact with jewelry still in place when moved here, and the other five individuals were fragmentary secondary burials with unknown connections to the child. A surprising find among the grave goods in this coffin was an inscribed gold bowl belonging to Šamši-ilu, the powerful field marshal (*turtānu*) under Shalmaneser IV, Aššur-dan III, and Aššur-nirari V, a span of roughly 782–745 BCE (Baghdad, Iraq Museum 115548 = ND 255; Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 119, fig. 152, plan 12; Fadhil 1990: 482).

Bronze coffin 2, the eastern lower coffin, was the second largest at 140 cm and contained the substantially complete skeleton of a female in her late teens, with her head to the north at the rounded end, and a few bones of a pre-teen child, probably intrusive. This coffin contained the tomb's most spectacular grave goods – including an elaborate gold floral crown imitating a grape arbor, and gold necklaces, bracelets, and anklets – all in the positions where they would have been worn. Boehmer (2006) argued that the floral crown was of western Syrian or eastern Cilician origin on the basis of the iconography of its small winged figures and flora. There were also a gold bowl in the form of

a double rosette, a spectacular gold spouted ewer with delicately embossed friezes showing hunting scenes, six stamp seals, and two cylinder seals.

Two of the seals were inscribed with the names of their owners. One of these, a gold-capped blue stone cylinder seal showing a god flanked by two kings and a worshipper, belonged to Ninurta-idiya-šukšid, and identifies him as a eunuch official of Adad-nirari III (Al-Rawi 2008: 135–6). The other is a gold stamp seal with a guilloche border, typical of royal seals, showing a female worshipper standing before the enthroned goddess Gula, behind whom is a scorpion, which is often represented on the property of palace women. The inscription states it belongs to Hama, and identifies her as queen of Shalmaneser IV, daughter-in-law of Adad-nirari III (Al-Rawi 2008: 136). This strongly suggests that the well-preserved, heavily bejeweled remains in this coffin are those of queen Hama and represent the principal burial around which the secondary interments clustered (Spurrier 2012). If this young woman was Hama, then she must have died during her husband's reign or very soon thereafter, giving a date for her burial around 773 BCE. The eunuch's seal, which is also consistent with this date, may have been a funerary gift.

Bronze coffin 3, the western lower coffin, was the largest at 147 cm and contained a few bones each from five adults – three men and two women – ranging in age from their thirties to sixties. It has been suggested that one of these individuals – a man around sixty years old – could have been Šamši-ilu, but this is speculation and it is noteworthy that Šamši-ilu's gold bowl was found in bronze coffin 1 (Oates and Oates 2001: 87). The documented grave goods in coffin 3 were less spectacular than those in the others, primarily vessels of copper and ceramic, with very little gold jewelry.

The latest datable object from tomb III was a 15 mina duck weight inscribed with a text of Tiglath-pileser III, found in the debris in the “front part” of the antechamber (Fadhil 1990: 480, Taf. 42–3; Hussein et al. 2016: 27, 151, pl. 94a). This is also roughly the date proposed by Curtis for the bronze coffins, which he dated to the late eighth century BCE on the basis of comparison with examples from other sites (Curtis 2008). Potential additional dating information comes from over 150 clay tablets found on the floor of room 57, the room beneath which the tomb was built. These belong to various palace officials, including the Palace Scribe and several Stewards of the Queen, and date from 800 to 734. They include texts from the reigns of all five kings who ruled during this period: Adad-nirari III, Shalmaneser IV, Aššur-dan III, Aššur-nirari V, and Tiglath-pileser III (Ahmad 2008). The tablets in room 57, therefore, cover the same time span as the dated objects in the tomb below its floor.

Despite the abundance of inscriptions in Tomb III, their wide range of dates together with the large number of burials, presents challenges for reconstructing the tomb's sequence of use. Perhaps the most straightforward

interpretation would be that the tomb was built by Shalmaneser III for Mulissu-mukannišat-Ninua, his father's queen, as evidenced by the inclusion of Shalmaneser's name in the inscriptions on the sarcophagus lid and doors. She was buried in the inner, vaulted chamber. Some sixty to seventy years later, the antechamber of the tomb was reopened for the burial of Hama, the young queen of Shalmaneser IV. The antechamber was prepared by laying a new brick pavement over the old one, sealing the doors to the inner chamber in the process. Despite Curtis's suggestion of a late eighth century date for the bronze coffins, at least bronze coffin 2 must date earlier, since Hama would have been placed in it very soon after her death, as evidenced by the good preservation of her skeleton and the location of her jewelry in the positions where it was worn. It seems likely that her coffin was placed in the antechamber at this time, although it is possible that it was moved there at a later date with her in it.

If Hama was in fact placed in the antechamber shortly after her death, then the tomb must have been reopened at least once during or after the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, as evidenced by the inclusion of his inscribed duck weight. At that time or on other occasions two more bronze coffins and bones from twelve more individuals were added. With the possible exception of the eight to eleven year old child in bronze coffin 1, all of these people were originally interred elsewhere, and only a few bones from each were later moved to Tomb III. The bones of the pre-teen child that were found in Hama's coffin might be explained by proposing that they belonged to a child of hers that survived her for a few years. Bronze coffins 1 and 3 and their occupants could have been added at the same time as Hama's coffin or anytime thereafter.

The reason why a few bones each from multiple individuals were moved to this tomb is a mystery. Architecturally, room 57 serves as a gate chamber between courtyards 56 and 55. The dates on the tablets found on its floor suggest that this room was being used by the Palace Scribe and queen's stewards, either as an office or for document storage, during the period from Adad-nirari III to Tiglath-pileser III. Perhaps these individuals were responsible for maintaining the funerary offerings for Mulissu-mukannišat-Ninua. Later, Hama and the twelve others were placed in the antechamber and the offerings could have been expanded to include them too. Ultimately Yaba and Atalia were buried in the adjacent room to the north where they too could benefit from these services. Therefore, whether by accident or design, this area could have become viewed as the traditional burial place of queens, where their needs in the afterlife were one focus of the administrative activity.

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Further Reading

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Harper et al. (1995, available for free download from <http://www.metmuseum.org/research/metpublications>), and for the first millennium, Curtis and Reade (1995), both supplemented by Marzahn and Salje (2003). For steles, obelisks, and rock reliefs from all periods, see Börker-Klähn (1982), with more specialized studies of obelisks in Reade (1975, 1980) and Orlamünde (2011).

There is considerable literature on Neo-Assyrian sculpture. General introductions are Reade (1983) and Russell (1998–2001). Meuszynski (1981) and Paley and Sobolewski (1987, 1992) provide a comprehensive catalog of the reliefs in the Northwest Palace of Aššurnāširpal II, while Russell (1998b) considers their meaning. For Aššurnāširpal's bronze gates, see Curtis and Tallis (2008). King (1915) is still the basic publication of the bronze gates of Shalmaneser III. Marcus (1997) gives a stimulating analysis of Shalmaneser's relief sculptures, and Reade (1963) documents the remarkable reassembly of that king's great glazed brick panel.

The fundamental modern publication of the sculptures of Sargon II is Albenda (1986), with additional studies in Caubet (1995). Barnett and his collaborators (1962, 1998, 1976) compiled the catalogs of the palace sculptures of Tiglath-pileser III, Sennacherib, and Assurbanipal, with additional Tiglath-pileser reliefs in Paley (n.d.) and more Sennacherib reliefs in Russell (1998a). For an analysis of Sennacherib's reliefs in their architectural context, see Russell (1991). The most readily accessible guides to the Nimrud tombs are Curtis et al. (2008) and Hussein et al. 2016, available for free download respectively at <http://www.bisi.ac.uk> and <http://oi.uchicago.edu/research/publications/misc/nimrud-queens-tombs>.

CHAPTER 25

Assyrian Technology

Ariel M. Bagg

Introduction

The complex technical projects realized in ancient Assyria required the existence of considerable technical knowledge and of specialists who held responsible positions and performed ambitious technical and organizational tasks. These specialists correspond to today's engineers, although engineering emerged as a profession only as recently as the nineteenth century CE. We have no information concerning their instruction or self-image, and a specific Assyrian concept of "engineer" is nowhere found. However, this does not mean that Assyrian "engineers" did not exist. Professionals such as the *etinnu* "house builder," *šellapāju* "architect," *šitimgallu* "chief builder," or *gugallu* "inspector of canals" all performed engineering tasks. Their work is documented in written sources, iconography, and archaeological remains. The skills of the Assyrian "engineers" are attested in the fields of city planning, the construction of monumental buildings and bridges, hydraulic engineering, and transportation of heavy loads.

In all major engineering projects, the Assyrian king appears in a key position as the principal client, financier, and manager. Yet although he presents himself as the sole person responsible for building projects, one must rather imagine him as a kind of project manager, who created guidelines, set the deadlines, and provided the resources, demanded to be kept informed about the progress of the construction work, and received all of the honors associated with the success of the enterprise.

City Planning and Monumental Buildings

The foundation of a new capital, or the transformation of an existing city into a capital city, is well-attested in Assyrian history and has been the object of several studies (Stronach 1994; Parpola 1995). The old trading city and cult center Ashur (Qal'at Širqaṭ) on the west bank of the Tigris River was the Assyrian capital during the Middle Assyrian period. It was the most important cult center throughout Assyrian history, and the Assyrian kings actively constructed, enlarged, and restored its buildings and fortifications.

Nevertheless, with an area of 70 hectares, Ashur remained the smallest of all of the Assyrian capitals.

The first in a series of newly-founded Assyrian capitals was built by king Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233–1197), who founded a cult center and royal residence called Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta, “Port Tukulti-Ninurta” (modern Tulul al-‘Aqar) on the east bank of the Tigris River, only three kilometers upstream from Ashur. Several royal inscriptions refer to the construction of the new city. One description reads: “At that time, the god Assur-Enlil, my lord, expressed the desire for a great city opposite my city and commanded me to build his sanctuary. Beside the ‘dwelling place’ of the gods I built a large city, my royal residence, (and) called it Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta. I completed within temples for Assur, Adad, Šamaš, Ninurta, Nusku, Nergal, Sebeti, and Ištar, the great gods, my lords. I opened the ‘Canal of Justice’ wide and (let it flow) to its sacred places” (Grayson 1987: 270, 39–46). The building account ends with the construction of the palace and the city wall.

Kalḫu (Tell Nimrud), located on the left bank of the Tigris River some 8 kilometers upstream from its junction with the Greater Zab, was the first of three sites that would become consecutive capitals of the Neo-Assyrian kings. Aššurnāṣirpal II (883–859) claims to have found Kalḫu, an ancient town, in ruins. He built there over a period of fifteen years and made it the new royal residence and administrative center of the growing Assyrian empire. The new city covered an area of about 360 hectares; it had a palace, nine temples, and a city wall and was provided, like Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta, with irrigation water.

Kalḫu remained the royal capital for about 140 years, until Sargon II (721–705) decided to build a new capital called Dur-Šarrukin, “Sargon’s Fortress” (modern Khorsabad), on virgin soil some 50 kilometers from Kalḫu. The construction of the city lasted from 717 to 706 BCE and is well documented in the royal inscriptions and in the official correspondence (Parpola 1995). The city covered an area of about 300 hectares; it was planned following geometrical principles and was probably never completed, since Sargon died unexpectedly on the battlefield in 705 BCE and his son Sennacherib moved the capital to Nineveh.

The inscriptions show Sargon’s personal participation during the planning and construction stages (Fuchs 1994: 293, 47–9) and his particular preoccupation with agricultural enterprises. Sargon presents himself as someone interested in the reclamation of unsettled steppes, in the cultivation of wastelands, in the planting of orchards, in the utilization of spring water resources, and in the irrigation of the land (Fuchs 1994: 292, 34–7). He was especially proud of having planted an exotic royal park near Dur-Šarrukin: “A great park like Mount Amanus wherein all kinds of aromatic trees from the land Ḫatti (i.e., northern Syria) and all of the fruit trees of the mountains were planted, I set out alongside it (i. e. the new city)” (translated from Fuchs 1994: 304, 41–2).

The import of botanical specimens and their acclimatization in Assyria had a long tradition – since the time of Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076) (Grayson 1991: 27, 17–23) – and was also undertaken by Aššurnāširpal II in Kalḫu. During the Sargonid period, however, a new concept of “park” (*kirimahḫu*) appeared; it was characterized not only by its exotic plants and trees but also by the modification of landscapes by means of ponds and artificial hills with a particular kind of pavilion at the top. All the Sargonid kings describe their gardens in the same way, comparing them to Mount Amanus, where the Assyrian kings traditionally cut down cedars and other exotic trees. One of these parks was depicted on the slabs covering the walls of the royal palace in Dur-Šarrukin (Bagg 2000a: 156–9).

Sennacherib (704–681) decided to transform the ancient city of Nineveh into his new capital. He built a 12-kilometer-long double city wall with an inner and outer part, which was about 15 meters wide and at least 24 meters high (Frahm 1997: 98–100). It was surrounded by a moat that was 70 meters wide and 10 meters deep. Furthermore, he built a new palace on the Kuyunjik mound and an arsenal on the Nebi Yunus mound. The area covered by the city was increased from 150 to 750 hectares. Taking the reasonable approximation of 100 people per hectare, the population of the city could have amounted to 75,000 inhabitants. The city was transformed into a glamorous metropolis. A fragmentary wall-panel probably features Nineveh’s southwestern corner (as viewed from the west), showing a double city wall with two gates, a moat fringed by trees on the right, an external fortification with another watercourse, and the Tigris River or a navigable main canal (Figure 25.1). The impressive hydraulic engineering project initiated to supply Nineveh with water will be described in detail below.

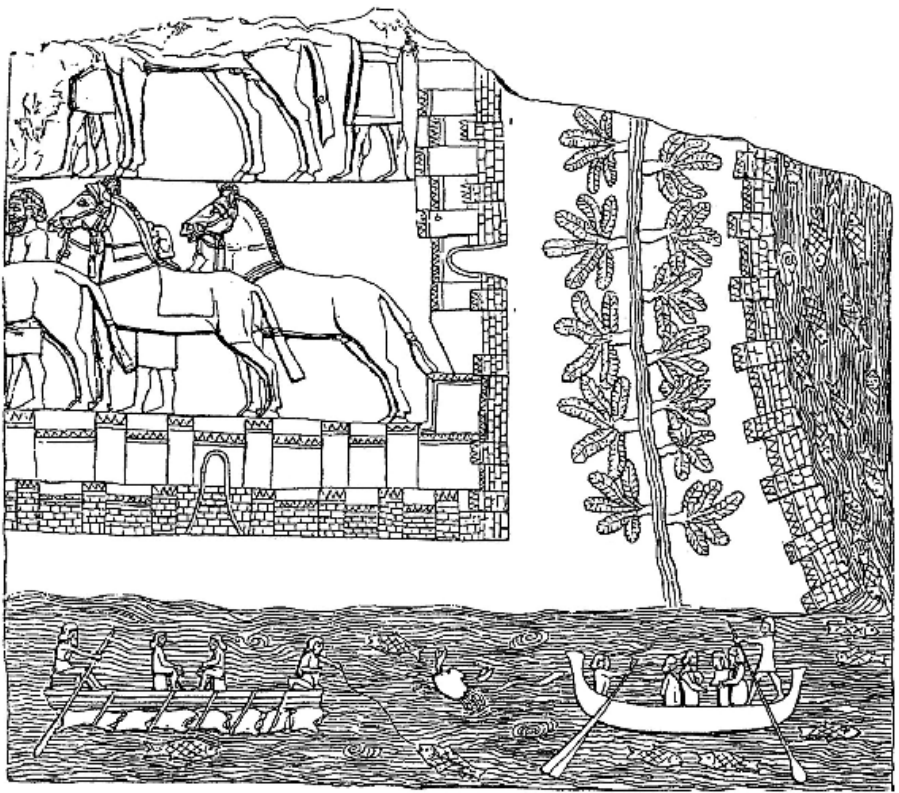


Figure 25.1 City wall, probably Nineveh's southwestern corner. Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room XXII, Plate 8.

Source: A.H. Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon*, London, 1853, 231.

The planning and construction of monumental buildings is one of the main activities for which an Assyrian king was celebrated. Thanks to the building accounts in the royal inscriptions, we are relatively well-informed about the construction of palaces, temples, and defensive works. These reports were written on the occasion of the construction of new buildings, as well as for repair work or the enlargement of existing structures, with the aim of making the name of the king last forever. The Assyrian kings always tried to build palaces that were larger than those of their predecessors. Thus, Shalmaneser III's armory in Kalḫu extended over an area of 250 meters by 350 meters, Sargon's palace in Dur-Šarrukin stood on a 12-meter-high terrace and measured 290 meters by 290 meters, and Sennacherib's "Palace Without Rival" in the southwestern part of Kuyunjik was built on a terrace (503 meters by 242 meters) which covered 12 hectares. Only 30 percent of its total surface (198 meters by 190 meters) and about 50 percent of its building surface have been excavated, but, even so, more than seventy rooms can be identified. Foundations, terraces, and walls needed exact planning because of the great amount of materials and manpower required. A challenge for the Assyrian

“engineers” was to roof large rooms, because they only had wooden beams at their disposal. This was a significant restriction in the design of representative rooms because they could have gigantic dimensions only in length. Other relevant technical problems that required well thought out solutions were the lighting in the rooms and the canalizations of courts, roofs, and toilets.

Hydraulic Engineering

Hydraulic works are attested in the Near East in all historical periods and geographical regions. Among the most significant engineering projects were the Assyrian hydraulic installations created from the 13th century BCE onward in conjunction with the foundation of new royal residences (Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta, Dur-Šarrukin) or with the reshaping of existing cities (Arbail, Ashur, Kalḫu, Nineveh). Other than in the Babylonian lowlands, it was not possible to divert or to tap water from the Tigris River because of the difference between the river’s level and its shore and the fluctuations of the water level. Therefore, water was diverted from other rivers, or water resources in the mountainous regions to the north and east were tapped, far away from the city that was to benefit from them.

The border between the dry-farming region and the arid areas in need of irrigation was not a line but rather a 400-kilometer-wide band between the 100 and 400 mm isohyets. In Assyria, especially in its southern part, periods of drought often jeopardized dry farming. Irrigation was necessary in order to secure the crops and to increase yield, which is the reason why the Assyrian kings undertook irrigation projects near their capital cities, where a large population was concentrated (Bagg 2000b: 309). Irrigation was intended primarily for the cultivation of fields and orchards, but was also used for the splendid royal parks and gardens that shaped the landscape of the Neo-Assyrian capitals.

In a report concerning the enlargement of Kalḫu, Aššurnāširpal II mentions the irrigation works explicitly: “I dug out a canal from the Upper Zab, cutting through a mountain at its peak, and called it ‘Canal of Abundance.’ I irrigated the meadows along the Tigris River. I planted orchards with all kinds of fruit trees in its environs. I pressed wine and offered the first fruits to Assur, my lord, and to the temples of my land” (Grayson 1991: 290, 36–41). The text continues with a list of forty-one exotic trees and a poetic description of a watered garden. This royal garden probably lay not far from the upper city of Kalḫu at its southwestern edge. Aššurnāširpal gives the irrigation of the fields along the Tigris River as a reason for the construction of the canal, which would allow the cultivation of fruit-trees. The size of the watered area is unknown, but a plausible estimation is that it could have comprised up to 2500 hectares. It is realistic to suppose that not the entire area was planted

with fruit trees, but that part of it (probably the greater part) was intended for the cultivation of barley (Oates 1968: 44–5). Irrigation increased the crop yield and reduced the risk of a harvest failure.

The course of the canal can still be traced as a rock-cut channel along the right bank of the Greater Zab River for some 8 kilometers from the modern village of Quwair to a point some 5 kilometers before the river joins the Tigris River, where the canal flows in a northwestern-southwestern direction towards Kalḥu (Oates 1968: 46–7). During part of its existence, the canal was fed by a rock-cut tunnel, the so-called Nagub tunnel (Bagg 2000a: 99–102 and 234–7; Davey 1985), which passes through a bluff of coarse conglomerate on the right bank of the Greater Zab River. An inscription found *in situ* documents restoration works carried out two hundred years later by Esarhaddon (680–669), when the tunnel was silted up (Borger 1956: 35–36, 6–13).

Aššurnasirpal's irrigation project testifies to the skills of the Assyrians, who were able to dig a 10-kilometer-long canal stretch in hard, rocky ground, to cut another 8 kilometers into the rock, to choose a favorable place for the canal intake, and to master the necessary leveling techniques.

To supply his newly-remodeled capital, Nineveh, and its environs with water, Sennacherib undertook the most ambitious hydraulic enterprise of his time. Four canal systems, a total of more than 150 kilometers, flowed to the city from different directions. They consisted of canals as well as channeled watercourses, tunnels, aqueducts, and weirs, which were built between 702 and 688 BCE and certainly posed a great challenge for the Assyrian hydraulic “engineers.” Royal inscriptions and palace reliefs show Sennacherib's interest in technical matters and innovations in the transport of heavy loads, in the acquisition of new materials, in metallurgy, as well as in water-lifting devices and hydraulic engineering, among others. Although the technical solutions surely did not come from the king himself but rather from his technical entourage, those projects would never have been realized without his personal engagement. For instance, in the year 694 BCE, spring water from mountains 20 kilometers away was collected in reservoirs and directed through canals into a wadi, which itself flowed into the Khosr River, a river that flows to and through Nineveh. In order to locate these new water sources, the king himself marched into this region, certainly accompanied by his technical staff. One may think of this as a “technical campaign” (Grayson and Novotny 2012: 144–5, lines 3–5).

In 688 BCE, the last stage of Sennacherib's hydraulic project was undertaken. Approximately 50 kilometers to the north of Nineveh, the Atruš/Gomel River was dammed at a gorge north of the modern village of Khinis in order to feed a canal that started at that point. The canal head, a masterpiece of Assyrian hydraulic engineering, was decorated with monumental rock reliefs and sculptured blocks and consisted of a dam, intake works, a 300-meter-long canal stretch with a retaining stone wall, and a tunnel bored into the rock.

From this tunnel, the diverted water was directed through a rock-cut channel into a 35-kilometer-long main canal, which flowed into a tributary of the Khosr. At the halfway point, an aqueduct was built with more than two hundred thousand limestone blocks to permit the crossing of a wadi next to the village of Jerwan. It was 280 meters long and 22 meters wide, with the channel seven meters over the foundations. Five corbelled arches spanned the valley and the canal bed was carefully plastered (Fales and Del Fabbro 2014). Different inscriptions carved on the stone blocks tell of the enterprise, identifying its builder: “Sennacherib, king of the world, king of Assyria. For a long distance I caused a canal to be dug from the river Ḫazur to the environs of Nineveh. Over deep-cut ravines I built an aqueduct of stone blocks. Those waters I caused to flow upon it” (Grayson and Novotny 2014: 321). The achievements of the Assyrian hydraulic “engineers,” who knew how to fulfill and to implement the desires of a king with an inclination towards technical innovations, were in this case recognized and recompensed: “those men, who dug this canal, I dressed with linen clothes and colored garments. [...], golden rings and golden pectorals I put upon them,” wrote the grateful king (Grayson and Novotny 2014: 315, lines 33–4). Sennacherib not only built the first ashlar aqueduct at Jerwan but also a second one in Nineveh, as is attested in the texts (Grayson and Novotny 2012: 123, vii 81–4).

In this context, it is worthwhile to mention a stone slab from Assurbanipal’s palace in the same city ([Figure 25.2](#)). The irrigated garden depicted there shows all of the elements of the Assyrian royal parks, namely the hill, the pavilion, and the different kinds of trees. The park is, in this case, watered by an aqueduct, which is very similar in shape to the Jerwan aqueduct, but probably represents the other aqueduct in or near Nineveh, which is mentioned in the texts (Bagg 2000a: 197–8).

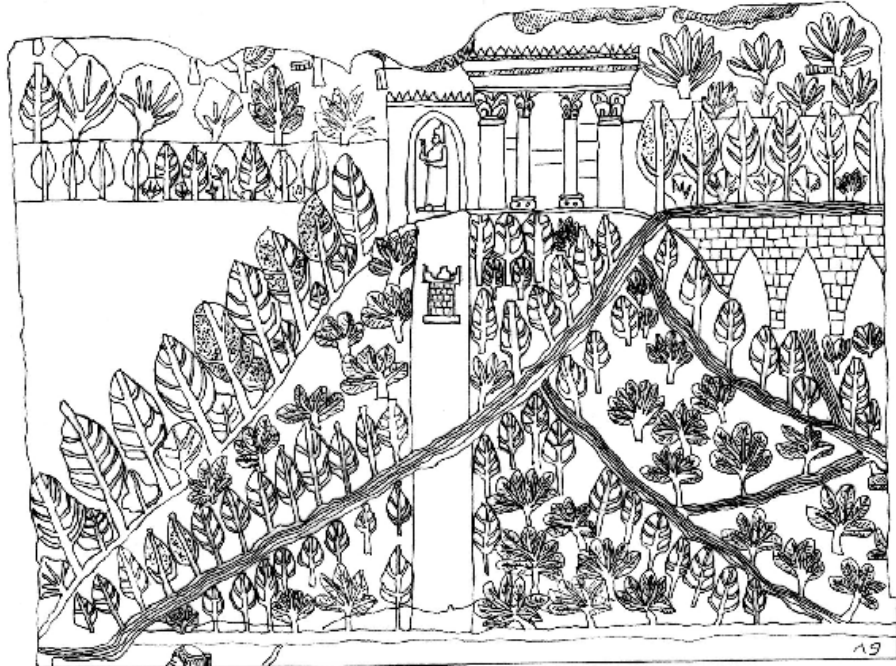


Figure 25.2 Irrigated park with aqueduct. Nineveh, North Palace, Room H (BM 124939).

Source: Reproduced with permission of A.M. Bagg.

Usually hidden, other kinds of installations, in particular the sewerage of buildings, accomplished extremely important functions as well – even if they could not compete with the hydraulic works mentioned above in terms of dimension. After the description of building enterprises in his new capital Kalḫu, Aššurnāširpal II warns future rulers against neglecting the maintenance of his new palace in one of his royal inscriptions: “he must not tear out its drain pipes (*našṣabu*). He must not clog the outlets of its drain spouts (*bāb zinni*)” (Grayson 1991: 253, 32–4).

According to the archaeological evidence, sewerage may be classified into four groups: 1) stone conduits (open and closed horizontal installations made of natural stone, usually limestone, basalt, or sandstone), 2) brick conduits (closed horizontal installations made of fired clay bricks), 3) clay pipes (usually horizontal, but sometimes also vertical, installations made of clay with a cylindrical or half-cylindrical hollow body), and 4) cesspits (vertical installations made, in most cases, of clay rings put one over another into a pit that was dug in the ground). By means of these installations, it was possible to drain the yards, roofs, and toilets in temples and palaces, as well as in private houses. Cesspits were used to dispose of wastewater from private houses, as shown in findings from the residential quarters in Ashur. Main sewers were laid in the streets in order to catch and dispose of wastewater that came from

the adjacent buildings. The main sewer of the Assur-Temple in the city of Ashur was in use over a period of many centuries in the second millennium BCE. The sewer had several different sections, was large enough for a man to walk through, and its vault was made of fired bricks. One section, for instance, was 12 meters long, 1.80 meters wide, 2 meters high and had a barrel vault made of bricks. Stamped bricks allow us to associate this work with Adad-nirari I, who reigned at the beginning of the 13th century BCE (Bagg 2006).

Bridges

Two types of bridges are attested in the Assyrian sources: temporary and permanent bridges. Most bridges were temporary structures built during military campaigns. Wide and deep rivers had to be crossed, often at the time of their highest water level, so the transportation of troops had to be considered as early as the planning stages of campaigns. Strategically, it was vital to know which materials could be found on-site and which materials and tools should be brought along. The easiest solution was to build a platform or a raft made of logs. Tiglath-pileser I reports that he felled trees during a campaign against the Nairi countries (an area to the north of the Taurus Mountains and the Murat-Su) and built bridges (*titurru*) so that his troops and chariots could cross the Euphrates River (Grayson 1991: 21, 68–71). Aššurnaširpal II crossed the Tigris River by means of a bridge made of logs (Grayson 1991: 210, 103–4). In this case, the term *raksu* is used for the bridge, which actually means “bounded” and, in this context, can be interpreted as a kind of raft. Depictions of pontoon bridges can be found on the bronze bands from Balawat, which date to the reign of Shalmaneser III (858–824). During a campaign in Armenia, the Assyrian troops crossed a river with the help of a “swimming bridge;” namely, a wooden platform carried by water skins (*maškaru, dušû*).

In contrast to temporary bridges, permanent bridges made of ashlar or masonry are known not only from the written sources but are also archaeologically attested. Stone bridges are known from two Assyrian towns. In his new capital, Dur-Šarrukin, Sargon II built a stone bridge connecting the palace terrace and the Nabû temple. The bridge was 3.7 meters wide, more than 5 meters high, and was held up with a pointed arch (Loud and Altman 1938: 32 with plates 11c and 12a–d). Sennacherib reports building a bridge (*titurru*) for the royal procession with fired bricks and limestone somewhere opposite the gate of the city center of Niniveh (Kuyunjik) (Grayson and Novotny 2012: 123, vii 85–viii 3). The exact location of this bridge is not known.

Transportation of Materials and Heavy Loads

Timber was scarce in Assyria but was indispensable for the roofing of buildings and the construction of gates, and thus its acquisition and transport represented a particular concern. Cedars, for instance, had to be brought from distant regions, which was done mostly during the course of military campaigns. The logs were first transported by land from the forest to the river and then shipped or rafted to their final destination. The water transport of timber is attested several times in the correspondence of Sargon II (SAA 1, 63. 102; SAA 5, 4. 6. 7. 254). Among other matters, navigation problems, which slowed or hindered delivery, are mentioned (SAA 1, 63). Another method for transportation is shown on a wall relief from Sargon's palace in Dur-Šarrukin. There, some logs are depicted as piled up on a ship while others are rafted, fastened with ropes at the ship's stern. Whether this was a maritime transport in the Mediterranean Sea (Albenda 1983) or a river transport (Linder 1986) is still a matter of discussion. In any case, the fact that such a scene was incorporated into the visual program that was depicted on the palace walls shows the importance this technical achievement held for Sargon's contemporaries. The water transport of other building components such as stone slabs, thresholds, or steps is also attested in the written sources and depicted on the reliefs (SAA 1, 56. 58. 59; SAA 5, 297; see BM 124822 and BM 124823 in SAA 1, page 53, fig. 17).

The greatest challenge concerning the transport of heavy loads was posed by the Assyrian bull-colossi, gigantic statues of human-headed, winged bulls that protected the entrances to the main rooms in the Assyrian palaces. These protective genii, up to 6 meters high and weighing up to forty or fifty tons, were made from single blocks of massive stone. Since the quarries lay several kilometers upstream from Nineveh and the other Assyrian capitals, the stone blocks could be brought down to their final destinations either by water or by land. Until the reign of Sennacherib, the stone blocks came from a quarry called Tastiate on the right bank of the Tigris River. Because all of the potential destinations lay on the left bank, water transport was unavoidable. We learn about the troubles and dangers associated with stone transportation in the official letters from the reign of Sargon II (SAA 1, 119. 120; SAA 5, 57. 58. 297. 298. 299. 300, water transport SAA 1, 119 and SAA 5, 298. 299). Among other matters, the texts inform us that, in some cases, watercrafts could not carry the heavy loads and sank (SAA 1, 119). Sargon's son Sennacherib was aware of the disadvantages of river transport and looked for a better solution: a new quarry on the left bank. Sennacherib characterizes the complicated water transport methods employed by his predecessors with these words: "bull-colossi of white limestone they quarried in Tastiate, which lies on the other bank of the Tigris River, as supports for their (i.e. the new

palaces') entrances. For the construction of boats they (i.e. the workers) felled mighty trees in the forests throughout the whole of their land. In the month Ajaru (April/May), at the time of the spring floods, they (i.e. the workers) laboriously brought them over to this side on mighty rafts. As they crossed the quay-wall, the large boats went down. (My predecessors) had their (i.e. the rafts') crew exert themselves and strain their bodies. By might and under the most dire conditions they landed them with difficulty and placed them by their doors" (Grayson and Novotny 2012: 138, v 64–78).

From the new quarry, which was called Balatai, the bull-colossi were transported by land, which was certainly more secure though no less laborious (Grayson and Novotny 2012: 140, vi 62–75). The northern and eastern walls of court VI in Sennacherib's Southwest Palace in Nineveh were decorated with a relief cycle that depicts the transport of one or more bull-colossi (Figure 25.3). The cycle begins with an image of the quarry, where the sculptors have already begun the stone block treatment. The colossus is then transported on a sledge, which is pulled by four teams of workers. Supervisors standing in front of the teams coordinate the entire operation while others "motivate" the workers with whips. Four more supervisors stand on the stone block and inspect the work, one of them carrying a megaphone. A fifth team of workers, at the rear, maintains the level of the sledge. Sennacherib himself observes the transport from a high position. The sledge's movement is facilitated by wooden planks or rollers, which the workers place under its front. The representation of such technical operations demonstrates not only Sennacherib's interest in technical matters but also his recognition of his "engineers'" achievements.

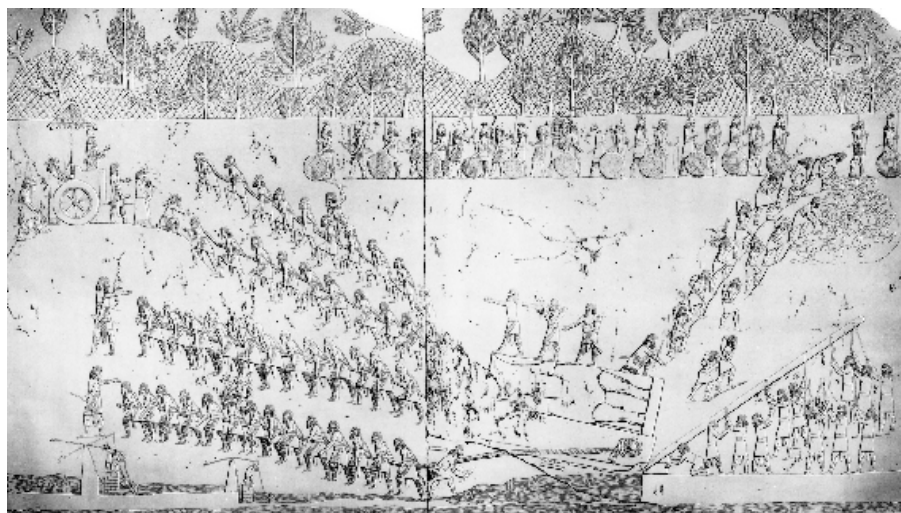


Figure 25.3 Transport of bull-colossus. Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Court VI, Plates 63–4 (BM 124820).

Abbreviation

SAA

= S. Parpola (ed.), *State Archives of Assyria*, 19 volumes published, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press 1987–.

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Further Reading

For the history of Mesopotamian “engineers,” see Bagg and Cancik-Kirschbaum 2006. City planning and monumental buildings are discussed by Lackenbacher (1982), who provides sources for the role of the kings as builders. For the construction of Dur-Šarrukin, see Parpola 1995; for the buildings in Kalḫu, see Postgate & Reade 1976–80. An excellent overview of the construction activities in Nineveh is provided by Reade 1998–2001. As for hydraulic engineering, see the comprehensive study of the Assyrian irrigation works in Bagg 2000a (with further literature and sources) and an overview (in English) in Bagg 2000b. For Sennacherib’s aqueduct at Jerwan see Jacobsen and Lloyd 1935 and Fales and Del Fabbro 2014. Concerning water-lifting devices in Assyria, see also Bagg 2001. Observations on ancient Near Eastern bridges can be found in Bagg 2011. For river transportation in the Assyrian sources, see Fales 1993, and for a study of timber transport Fales 1983.

CHAPTER 26

Assyrian Warfare

Stephanie Dalley

Sources of information on how Assyrians conducted wars include cuneiform texts of various kinds on stone and clay, stone panels carved in low relief, cylinder seals, and various kinds of excavated material. They are unevenly distributed through time. Before the great palace bas-relief panels of the ninth–seventh century BCE, texts and pictorial representations are sparse: almost non-existent for the third millennium (Early Bronze Age), and rare for the second (Middle and Late Bronze Age). Until the full development of chariotry and horsemanship in the mid-second millennium, we rely on occasional references in the correspondence of officials.

The texts are mainly found at Mari on the Middle Euphrates, at Tell al-Rimah west of Nineveh, and at Shemshara, east of the Tigris. Those texts, many from the reign of Šamši-Adad I of Assyria (ca.1808–1776), show that foot-soldiers as the mainstay of the fighting forces were recruited and equipped on a local basis, their loyalty encouraged through the *tēbibtum* ceremony which included a ritual act of sympathetic magic, swearing an oath of loyalty, and eating food that would turn against a perjurer. Conscription was linked partly to the *ilkum*-duty which could include non-military activity, and partly to the use of semi-nomadic people, on a seasonal basis (e.g. Charpin 2004). Many weapons at that time were derived from hunting (bow and arrows and nets) and agriculture; the main weapon was the spear, *šukurrum*, a word which was also used to mean military service. Units consisted of tens and hundreds; numbers of people involved in particular expeditions numbered thousands and occasionally tens of thousands according to letters, which may be approximately reliable.

Kings made military alliances reinforced with oaths, often of short validity; Šamši-Adad I complained that the crazy ruler of Aḫazum had broken oaths to five kings in close succession:

He makes an alliance with one king and swears an oath. He makes an alliance with another king and swears an oath, breaking off relations with the first king with whom he made an alliance.

(Eidem and Laessøe 2001: no. 1)

Raiding, capture of slaves, taking hostages for ransom, escort duties, and the occasional siege of a walled town, were deeds carried out with mainly bronze

weapons: axe, spear, sword, as well as wood and stone: mace and bow and arrow. Battering rams were deployed, but results were sometimes slow, especially where freezing weather made movement impossible: a Shemshara letter tells of a siege that lasted for nine years. An effective ploy at some sites was to divert a watercourse upstream. Armor for head and body was probably made of leather. On a rare representation the ruler is shown on foot, wielding an axe, with his left foot treading down a conquered foe (Louvre stela AO 2776). The light chariot began to emerge for use in battle around 1800 BCE, carrying an archer with a composite bow (Moorey 1986). Two inventions, the jointed bit for horses (replacing the nose-ring) and the spoked wheel (replacing the solid wheel), are the two crucial advances in technology that enabled chariots to become effective.

Since towns and cities were storage centers for a largely redistributive economy, they needed protection from attack. Temples and palaces were built at the highest point on a citadel, encircled with one or two concentric walls of mud-brick. The height of towers at intervals on the walls gave useful look-out points and an advantage against attack. A moat would hinder ladders and battering rams being set up against the city wall. Garrison forts (*birtum*) could provide reinforcements for the besieged. Booty, ransom, and the capture of slaves helped to enrich a city-state. Trading abroad was backed up by treaties, and perhaps also by military escorts (*mušallimum*, *taqribātum*), and the threat of force. Diviners, whether centralized or local accompanists on campaign, frequently consulted the gods Šamaš and Adad, enquiring whether, for example, a city was safe from attack

by disturbing, overturning, pushing, by revolt, by trickery, by siege, by smooth talk, by undermining, by sheer might, by encircling, by heaping up earth, by causing distress, by cutting off food supply, by breaching walls, by siege tower, by battering ram, by claw, by ladder, by boring engines, by cutting through a wall, by ramp, by spreading confusion, by causing panic, by the robber's dagger, by hunger, famine, want, thirst, ... by as many tricks as there are ...

(Lambert 2007: no.1)

Fire signals allowed fast communication in clear weather. The army was led by two gods presumably represented by the standards of Nergal (Erra) and Adad, to right and left of the king, a practice that continued into the Neo-Assyrian period (Durand 1998: 393; Wiggermann 1998–2001: 222, 226; and see [Figure 26.1](#)).

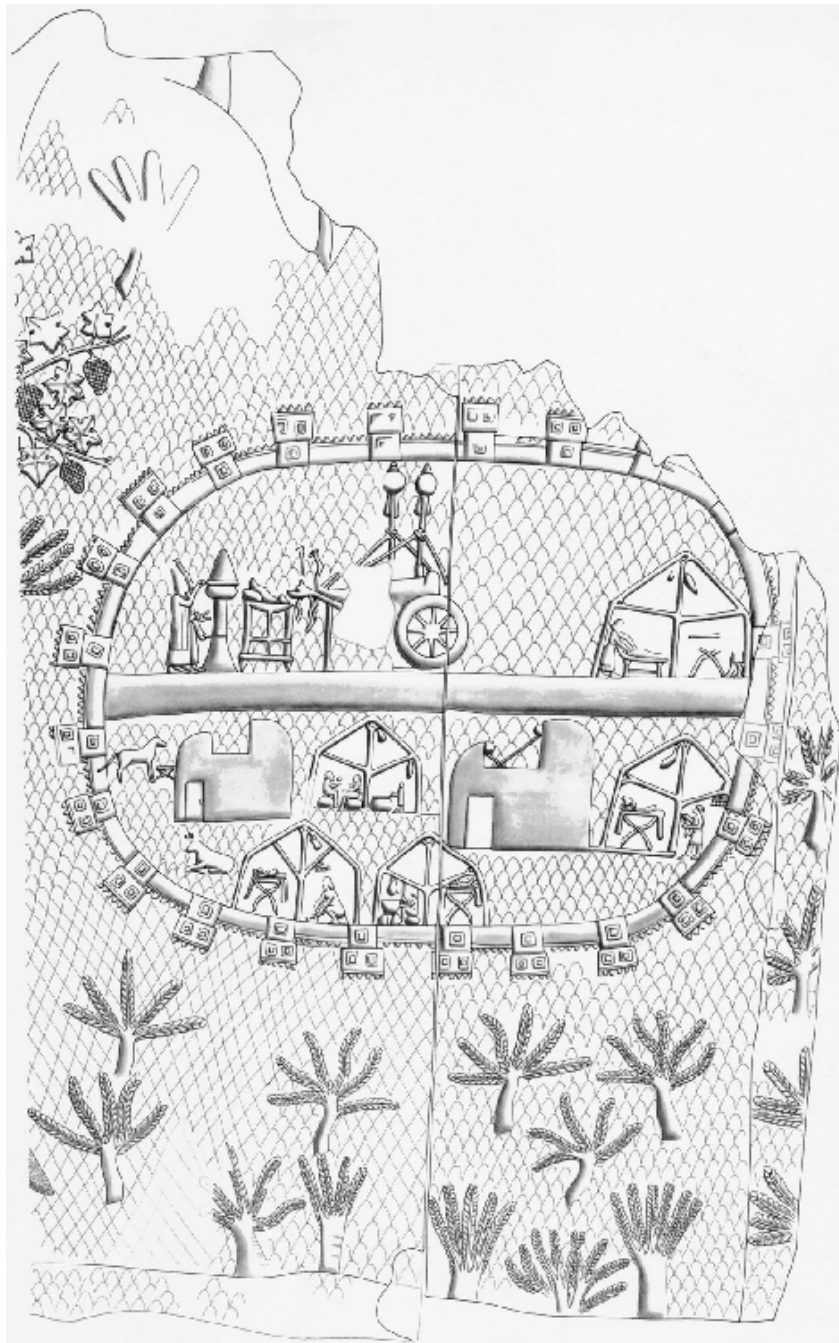


Figure 26.1 Panel of bas-relief sculpture from the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh showing the Assyrian camp at the siege of Lachish, with two priests making offerings to two military standards.

Source: Reproduced with permission of Judith Dekel, from Ussishkin 1982, Segment VIII.

After a break of several centuries (roughly 1700–1400 BCE) for which information is lacking, a major change in the conduct of warfare is apparent, both from inscriptions and from sculpture. Owing to the expense and expertise involved, military prowess was transformed into an elite occupation backed by specialist skills in training horses and in wood-working. From this time onwards metal body armor developed, especially scale armor consisting of overlapping bronze platelets sewn on to a backing of leather. Details from texts are sparse, but increasing centralization can be assumed, possibly leading to the formation of a standing army. Already a “royal road” is attested, leading westwards from Assyria, and a systematic building of forts to guard routes and to supply travelers and troops is confirmed by archaeological survey and excavation.

Some of the observable changes may be due to foreign influence. For instance, a manual for horse-training was taken over from the Indo-Iranian Mittani kings who ruled a largely Hurrian population in north-western Assyria; a Hurrian word *mariannu* was used for a chariot-driver, and the use of the Hurrian military title *turtānu* suggests that a new command structure was adopted. Some enclaves of Kassite horsemen, emigrants from the highlands of western Iran who settled on the Middle Euphrates, served as equestrian specialists. These are examples of how Assyrians absorbed expertise from their periphery. A system of provincial governors enabled kings of the Middle Assyrian period to conquer and control new territories. Their policy of deporting large numbers of conquered peoples (Oded 1978) provided a labor force for building works and for agriculture, and brought new specialist skills into Assyria; but punishment of defeated enemies was harsh; for instance against Šattuara the king of Mittani, Shalmaneser I (1263–1234 [1273–1244]) wrote: “I butchered their hordes, 14,400 of them I blinded and carried off alive” and of the Gutians “I filled the broad countryside with the corpses of their warriors” (Grayson 1987: 184). Literary hyperbole can be identified by other types of detail; for instance, Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233–1197 [1243–1207]) “made the entire land of the Qutû look like ruin hills from a deluge,” “surrounded their army with a circle of sandstorms,” and “filled caves and ravines of the mountains with their corpses.” He also claims, however: “I captured hordes of princes and brought them bound to my city ... made them swear loyalty by the great gods ... and released them to their lands ... annually I receive their valuable tribute ...” (Grayson 1987: 234). An accidental result of moving large numbers of soldiers and prisoners was the spread of diseases.

At the beginning of the first millennium (Iron Age) the Neo-Assyrian army inherited from its predecessors a warrior ethic based on elite chariotry, a system of provincial governors who raised local levies, and reliance on mass deportation to break up centers of resistance. Two new developments consist of the gradual introduction of iron for weaponry and armor, and the increasing

use of cavalry which eventually relegated chariotry to a mainly ceremonial role, perhaps as early as the reign of Sargon II. Shalmaneser III (858–824) claims to have captured from an alliance of Damascus and Hamath after the battle of Qarqar in Syria in 853 equal numbers of chariotry and cavalry (Grayson 1996: p.23), whereas when Sargon II (721–705) conquered Carchemish, he took fifty chariots and 200 cavalry, a ratio 1:4, into his royal regiment (Luckenbill 1927 vol. 2: p. 4).

Information derives from bas-relief panels from the palaces, beginning with Aššurnāširpal II's Northwest Palace at Nimrud in the ninth century and ending with those of Assurbanipal's North Palace at Nineveh in the mid-seventh; and from wall-paintings found at Til Barsip in a governor's palace (late eighth to mid-seventh century BCE). Battles, sieges, tribute and looting, punishment and prisoner-taking, weaponry and armor, are shown in great detail, covering many different parts of the empire. Similar detail is shown on bronze bands decorating the great temple doors at Balawat, one set from the reign of Aššurnāširpal II, the other of Shalmaneser III, sometimes giving types of scene that are not extant on palace panels. The scenes were presumably composed by war artists who accompanied the army.

Administrative texts mainly from the late eighth and seventh century record details of supply – men, animals, arms, and armor, sometimes with quantification; they include lists of men with military titles, lists of horses, lists of top people at celebratory banquets; all recorded in Assyrian cuneiform on clay, also towards the end of the empire in Aramaic on papyrus, parchment and ostraca; bas-reliefs show the two types of scribe standing side by side. Letters of officials, especially abundant for the reign of Sargon II, reveal details of organization. Witnesses with military professions listed in legal texts in order of rank are especially useful. Divination queries requesting guidance on the timing and performance of campaigns are extant for the reigns of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, a tradition derived from earlier, similar texts. They were asked of the sun-god Šamaš as a ram was sacrificed, along these lines:

Šamaš, great lord, give me a firm positive answer to what I request of you. From this day x, this month y, this month z, for 30 days and nights, my stipulated term: within this stipulated term will the king of ... strive and plan? Will he mobilize a powerful army against ... the magnates and army of Assyria? Will they ambush or attack, kill and plunder them?

(Starr 1990)

Treaties with vassal kings and with client kings were composed according to particular circumstances. In the case of Phoenician cities, Assyria relied on good relations because they needed expert boat-builders, and access to trade in the East Mediterranean; Sennacherib had Phoenicians build boats on the Euphrates for his campaigns in the marshes of southern Babylonia. Royal

annals contain embedded itineraries and tribute lists, derived from administrative records; and royal letters written as reports on one particular campaign, addressed to the gods, contribute to a much fuller picture than was possible for preceding periods (Borger 1957–71: 576).

A network of roads, some of them called “royal roads,” allowed communication by royal mule express making use of way-stations (*bēt mardēti*); the officer in charge was the *rab kallie* (Kessler 1997).

Our understanding of the structure and units of the army is dependent on how reliably we interpret the words and logograms for terms of profession. Two terms can apply simultaneously to one man whose duties were flexible and various; Assyrian dialect words may be used as alternatives to Babylonian ones; literal etymologies at first taken at face value are sometimes modified by better contexts. For those reasons the words and logograms have been included where applicable.

The term *kišir šarri* “king’s unit” is thought to refer to the standing army. A *kišru* might consist of 1000 men, or a subdivision, always a decimal. Infantry (*zūk, zukkū; raksūte*) formed the backbone of the army, conscripted through the *ilku*-system which applied both to the heartland and to the provinces: everyone was required to serve, perhaps seasonally, whether in civic works or in the army, or else to provide a substitute. There were three classes: light, medium (regular) and heavy. Light infantry probably included semi-nomadic Aramaean tribesmen, notably Ituean archers and Gurrean spearmen who wore a headband rather than a helmet, and often went barefoot. They might serve as garrison troops, or carry out policing duties. In battles and sieges they are shown working in pairs. They carried swords in addition to bows or spears. Elamite archers, identifiable by a headband tied behind the head, fought among them as expert archers. Medium (“regular”) infantry, likewise armed as archers or as spearmen, wore the Assyrian pointed helmet made of bronze or bronze and iron, and various shapes of shield, but no body armor until the mid-seventh century when a breast-plate is seen. Heavy infantry included not only archers and spearmen but also slingers. They were trained to fight in close formation in pitched battle, in pairs in other types of combat. They often wore scale armor, boots, pointed helmets, and round shields. They probably also served as royal bodyguards. In all three categories of infantry, officers have not been identified. The term *kallāpu* may refer to infantrymen, but a function as sappers has also been suggested, and *kallāp šipirti* seems to refer to swift messengers, perhaps indicating the variety of tasks performed. Palace guards and city gate guards are sometimes distinguished, and may have been co-opted from the regular infantry. Foreign levies drafted into the infantry can be identified by crested helmets or other characteristic headgear. The rate of marching has been estimated at 32 km per day, obviously dependent on weather and terrain.

Cavalry (*ša pērḫalli*) were mounted on the small horses bred in the mountains

and steppes to the north of the Assyrian heartland, serving as a single group in the ninth century, but later divided into two groups: lancers (*šāb kabābi*), and archers (*šāb qašti*). Both kinds also carried a sword. Skill in cavalry was especially famous in the kingdom of Urartu, centered around Lake Van and the Araxes valley. The Urartians, expert in rearing and training those mountain ponies, served the Assyrians as equestrian advisers, and Urartian cavalry served in the Assyrian army despite the official enmity between the two countries (Dalley 1985). In the ninth century cavalymen were seated on a leather saddlecloth, barefoot without stirrups, a round shield strapped to their back. They worked in pairs, the one shooting with bow and arrow, while his partner (*šāb azmarî*) protected him with a shield; but by the end of the Neo-Assyrian period cavalry are shown lined up in battle formation. Horses were not shod at this date. The commander of cavalry was the *rab muggi ša pēthalli*. During the reign of Esarhaddon Median tribesmen, presumably cavalry, were brought in as royal bodyguards (Liverani 1995); a generation later they took revenge on their weakened masters by smashing the tablets on which their oaths of loyalty had been inscribed. By the reign of Assurbanipal horses wore leather armor over the neck and body, and the forehead was protected by a bronze or ivory plaque, such as have been excavated as far afield as Samos. Ivory blinkers and ivory or bronze frontlets have also come to light, perhaps for ceremonial occasions. At that time riders too were protected, with metal scale armor for the upper body, and boots.

The chariot maintained its prestige throughout the period as the royal vehicle and for top officials including the standard-bearers of Nergal and Adad, who led the army as they had done for a millennium. The light, open-sided chariot of the twelfth century was replaced by the ninth century with a heavier model, though the former may have continued in use, especially for hunting, its charioteers represented by the profession *ša pattūte* (LÚ.GAB.MEŠ). Three horses are visible on the heavy chariot, of which two were harnessed, and the third presumably a spare. An important innovation to the design of chariots, already seen in the mid-ninth century, was to move the wheel axle from the center of the carriage box to the rear. The addition of a studded metal tyre to the outside of the wheel ensured better grip to avoid skidding and to allow a tighter turning circle. Wheels were made with six spokes for Assyrians in the ninth century, though the wheels on contemporary enemy chariots might have eight or even twelve spokes. By the reign of Tiglath-pileser III wheels had eight spokes which became standard for the rest of the period (Littauer and Crouwel 1979). The chariot crew consisted of the nobleman-warrior, *māru damqulmār dammaqūte* (= EN.GIŠ.GIGIR?), the rein-holder (*mukil appāte*), and the “third man” (*tašlišu*), who held a spiked round shield. The crew wore helmets but no body armor. Fixed to the chariot box the protome of a god is occasionally visible on bas-reliefs; also a pair of quivers each holding up to fifty arrows, and a pair of axes. The nobleman-warrior mainly acted as an archer, his superior elevation in battle allowing him to pick targets accurately

and to direct the cohorts. By the reign of Assurbanipal the chariot had larger, heavier wheels; the crew increased from three to four men, wore scale armor as well as pointed helmets, and the horses were protected with leather armor as the cavalry horses had been earlier. Chariots were drawn by a larger breed of horses than were ridden by the cavalry. Egypt was a major source of supply, but the ultimate place of origin was Nubia, so the horses were called Kushite, as was a particular type of harness. Some horses were obtained along with foreign charioteers, some by gift exchange and tribute, but there were also specialized horse-traders, *tamkar* ANŠE.KUR.RA. As many as sixteen stablemen, *ša ma'assi*, were at the disposal of a Kushite rein-holder, perhaps as a top trainer. Grooms, *susānu*/LÚ.GIŠ.GIGIR, worked perhaps always as three per chariot team. In the reign of Sargon II the “recruitment officer” (*mušarkisu*) was in charge of a chariotry cohort (*kišru*) comprising 100 men, and cavalry too seems to be found in groups of 100. Foreign units began to play a major role: Sargon had a group of thirteen equestrians from Samaria whose profession “commander of teams” (*rab urâte*) refers in this instance to chariotry; it may refer to both chariotry and cavalry in the case of units brought in from Hamath and Carchemish (Dezsö 2006). The leader of chariotry on campaign was the *rab muggi ša mugirri* (Radner 2002: 12–13).

The king was accompanied by his closest associates, the *ša qurubte*, sometimes referred to as royal bodyguards, some drawn from the infantry. Another type of bodyguard or escort (or a type of duty performed by various types of soldier) seems to be the *ša šēpē* literally “he of feet,” who could be infantry, cavalry, or chariotry. Indispensable to the army were guides (*rādi kibsi*), and interpreters (*targumannu*), probably both drawn from groups of deportees. The term *labbašu*, literally meaning “clothed,” may refer to uniforms that reflect rank; however, non-Assyrian levies wore their local battle-dress; enemies are distinguished by their local dress (Wäfler 1975) and seem to be distinguished only by context. A term for an armorer has not been identified. Mules were trustworthy beasts of burden, often taken as tribute. By the time of Esarhaddon, camels had their place in the Arsenal at Nineveh, perhaps implying the existence of a camel corps. The occasional letter still refers to fire signals.

The time and place of pitched battles was perhaps always agreed in advance. Its success often resulted in the siege or capture of an important city. Chariotry and cavalry supported infantry and chased fleeing enemies. The most detailed description is of the battle at Ḫalule in Sennacherib’s reign (Grayson and Novotny 2012: 332–4). Siege warfare is the subject of several groups of bas-relief panels, of which one of the largest shows Sennacherib’s siege of Lachish in Judah (Ussishkin 1982), an event surprisingly not mentioned in the official account of the campaign. Scaling ladders, ramps, battering rams, siege towers, flaming brands and tunneling, diverting of rivers as well as blockades to ensure eventual starvation, were all used to bring

about capitulation (Figure 26.2).



Figure 26.2 Panel of bas-relief sculpture from the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib showing the siege of Lachish and deportees leaving.

Source: Reproduced with permission of Judith Dekel, from Ussishkin 1982, Segment IV.

A siege might be prolonged for more than a year: Sennacherib besieged Babylon for more than fifteen months, and Assurbanipal besieged the same city for twenty-two months. It is doubtful whether there were specialist soldiers for the work: no specific terms of profession have been identified, so maybe the infantry could act as required. Likewise when the cutting of new roads through mountains was needed, the general soldiery may have worked with co-opted local labor. A few texts describe how persuasion was used to encourage submission during a siege. Withdrawal from an unsuccessful siege is marked by a standard episode of cutting down trees in the vicinity (Cole 1997).

In the mid-seventh century the empire was at its greatest extent. The policy of massive punishment seems to have altered, as retribution against rebels became more selective; some deliberate damage was restricted and in part symbolic (Crouch 2009). Deportees were allowed to leave together with their families and some possessions, at least in some instances, and were free to lead their own lives in a new place, as Sargon emphasizes in his inscriptions,

affirming that they were allowed to continue in their own professions, and were counted as Assyrians (Oded 1978). Under such conditions their co-operation and loyalty would often be reliable, at least while Assyria was strong. Booty was officially listed while goods were brought out of temples and palaces. Fine objects were sometimes dedicated in Assyrian temples. Officers rewarded their men for loyalty and bravery with bracelets, presumably made of a precious metal: a bas-relief shows a bearded officer with pointed Assyrian helmet, quiver, sword, and boots putting a bracelet on the wrist of a barefoot infantryman who wears a crested helmet (Postgate 1994). There is minimal evidence that land, the so-called bow-fief (*bēt qašti*), was granted by the king with the requirement to outfit and support an archer, a system much better attested in Babylonia in later periods.

Provincial governors were assigned from the top rank of the Assyrian elite. Some of them may have been close relatives of the king, or eunuchs, depending on the understanding of *ša rēšē*/LÚ.SAG and the significance of beardlessness. They levied troops, sometimes led campaigns, and negotiated with foreign rulers, in addition to non-military duties. Above all, they corresponded regularly with the king. Their titles are honorific: Chief Cupbearer (*rab šāqê*), Vizier (*sukkallu*), Palace Herald (*nāgir ekalli*), Chief Treasurer (*masennu*), and others (Mattila 2000).

For conscription, substitution, and exemption, census lists were drawn up. Lists of various types of soldier, present or absent; lists of incoming horses with a description of color; lists of those present at banquets with their specific wine ration – all these types of text show an efficient administration at work.

The king was ostensibly the leader of all campaigns, and certainly took part on some occasions (Figure 26.3). The patron deity of warfare to whose influence he explicitly referred in texts was Ištar, perhaps always implying Ištar of Arbela, and her prophecies often encouraged the king (Parpola 1997; Nissinen 1998). Although the king's participation has sometimes been doubted, Sargon II was certainly killed in battle. Royal annals rarely name leaders other than the king, but occasionally other members of the king's family are named; Sammu-ramat, wife of Shalmaneser III and mother of Adad-nirari III was exceptional for taking part in a campaign with her son and having her own first-person account added to his (Grayson 1996: 205).



Figure 26.3 Panel of bas-relief sculpture from the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib showing Sennacherib on his throne at the siege of Lachish, Nubian soldiers submitting, and war-chariot with eight-spoked wheel.

Source: Reproduced with permission of Judith Dekel, from Ussishkin 1982, Segment VI.

As age and exhaustion took their toll, a long-lived king might delegate leadership to one of his commanders, as Shalmaneser III did, naming his *turtānu* Dayyan-Aššur in his stead. Sargon II named his brother Sîn-aḫū-ušur as co-leader in a campaign to Urartu (Thureau-Dangin 1912: line 132).

Bas-reliefs show that temporary military camps were carefully designed with tents and collapsible furniture (see [Figure 26.1](#)). Chariots could be dismantled and carried on foot. To enable men and baggage to cross soft ground in wet weather, interlocking planks could be fitted and laid down. Rivers could be crossed with rafts or temporary pontoons. Military training included loading horses on to small boats, and swimming.

Numbers of troops in battle grew ever higher as the Assyrian empire

expanded. Armies in the hundreds of thousands are recorded; the numbers are not necessarily unreliable if one takes into account copying errors, upgrading, and compilation (De Odorico 1995). Round decimal numbers may be based on units of 1000 or 100 men. Victories were emphasized, but a defeat early in Sargon's reign was officially recorded (Grayson 1981). By the seventh century if not earlier, triumphal ceremonies included a procession travelling from Nineveh to Arbela and on to Ashur, display of trophies, composition of a new epic, dramatic performance of a battle, and feasting to music (Villard 2008).

The most detailed account of a campaign is given by the letter in which Sargon reported to the Assyrian gods his campaign of 712 which set off from Nimrud against the Urartians. It includes preparatory road-building, ethnographic detail, an epic-style itinerary, favorable astronomical omens, and a list of booty (Thureau-Dangin 1912).

Nimrud was the main center for military organization, where Shalmaneser III had built an Arsenal, the *ekal māšarte*, a huge building complex with defensive towers and enormous courtyards in the lower city, designed for "the preparation of camp equipment, mustering stallions, chariots, harness, equipment of war and all kinds of booty from enemies." It continued in use through subsequent reigns (Oates and Oates 2001: [chapter 5](#)). Sennacherib and Esarhaddon built another such Arsenal at Nineveh.

Several possible reforms of the army have been detected. Tiglath-pileser III may have incorporated foreign troops into the standing army at least to a far greater proportion than before. A particular group of deportees called *šaglûte* formed a unit of chariotry within the royal unit. Sargon II appears to have split the single post of the *turtānu* into two: the *turtānu* of the left and the *turtānu* of the right. He may also have relegated chariotry to a ceremonial role while making cavalry the superior force. Under Sennacherib there may have been a reform that gave the queen (or queen mother) and the crown prince control over specific regiments, with land-holdings in support. At that time the *rab ša rēšē* appears to play a dominant role. All these suggestions are questionable because sources from the different reigns are uneven, but there is no doubt that the army changed in many ways over the centuries.

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Further Reading

For letters and administrative texts found at Mari, see in general the series *Archives Royales de Mari*, and Durand 1997–2000. For palace sculptures and ivories, see [Chapter 24](#), above. Neo-Assyrian correspondence and administrative texts with translations in the series *State Archives of Assyria* are now online at <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/saao/corpus>. Royal inscriptions of Assyria with translations are available in the series *Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period* (ed. G. Frame). For the late periods Luckenbill 1927, vol. 2 is still useful.

Dezsö 2006 and especially Dezsö 2012 give up-to-date and reliable accounts of weaponry and how to understand the professional terminology of the Neo-Assyrian army. De Odorico 1995 provides a careful, detailed analysis showing how reliable or otherwise are the numbers given for troops, enemies, prisoners, booty, etc. Mattila 2000: 149–60 has an excellent section on the highest officials and the army, with the proviso that the translation “eunuch” for *ša rēšē* is unquestioned. Eph’al 2009 gives a clear account of Assyrian siege practices based on a wide variety of textual and sculptural sources (see also De Backer 2013). Crouch 2009 analyzes the ideology behind the actions recorded in royal inscriptions and makes careful comparisons with the actions of Judah and Israel. Villard 2008 documents the ceremonies celebrating victory.

CHAPTER 27

Thoughts on the Assyrian Empire and Assyrian Kingship

Mario Liverani

Translatio imperii

The dreams of Nebuchadnezzar II in the Book of Daniel contain the best-known illustration of the ancient theory of *translatio imperii* (the “transfer of rule” or “sequence of empires”), which postulates the existence of three or four successive Near Eastern empires. Dan. 2:31–3 describes a dream featuring a statue with a golden head (Babylon?), a silver breast (Media?), a bronze belly (Persia?), and iron legs (Macedonia?) with iron/clay feet. Dan. 7:3–8 mentions a winged lion (Babylon?), a bear (Media?), a leopard (Persia?), and a wild beast with ten horns (Macedonia?) (Kratz 1991: 197–25). Earlier, during the Achaemenid period, Herodotus had suggested a three-empire sequence, referring to the transfer of world dominion from Assyria (after 520 years of rule) to the Medes (*Histories* I 95), and then, after 128 years of Median rule, to the Persians (I 130). The shift from a three-empire sequence to a four-empire one (adding Macedonia) can be dated to shortly after Alexander’s conquest of Persia, ca. 330 BCE. A similar sequence, although with several differences in terms of the dates and the kings’ names, is later found in Ctesias and quoted by Diodorus and others (FGrHist 688 F 5 = Jacoby 1958: 449–51; Lenfant 2004: 79 and 93).

The theory of *translatio imperii* was not, however, purely a Biblical or classical invention but rather had its origins in much earlier Mesopotamian traditions. Its basic principles were deeply rooted in Mesopotamian thought and textual traditions. Since at least the time of the collapse of the Ur III empire (or even that of Akkad), the idea of continuity between successive empires was implicitly expressed by the Sumerian King List, which describes a unitary kingship passed from one city to another, resulting in claims such as Isin’s assertion that it was the direct descendent of Ur, or Babylon’s insistence that it was the heir of Akkad. In later (Neo- and Late Babylonian) periods, the idea of continuity from one king or dynasty to the next survives in the so-called “Akkadian Prophecies” as well as the “Dynastic Prophecy” (Grayson 1975: 24–37; see Hasel 1979), which describes the succession from the Assyrian Empire to the Neo-Babylonian Empire to the Persian Empire and, finally, to the Macedonian-Seleucid Empires. The “Dynastic Prophecy” was

clearly composed in the Seleucid period (when this succession was already an established pattern), but the Neo-Babylonian kingdom's claim that it was the heir of Assyria, and Cyrus's similar declaration that the Persian Empire was the direct descendant of the Chaldean dynasty, anticipated the ideas expressed in this text.

This ancient idea of the succession of empires, preserved and memorialized in Biblical and classical sources, did not end with the collapse of the Seleucid Empire. Rather, the tradition was adjusted to include later empires. An expansion to establish the Roman Empire as the fifth empire can be dated to the period after the Roman annexation of Seleucid Syria (63 BCE) (Wiesehöfer 2003). Later, the successors of the Roman Empire were added to the sequence: in the East, the "first Rome" (Rome itself) was followed by a "second Rome" (Byzantium) and a "third Rome" (Moscow). In the West, conversely, the Frankish and German Empires were considered the heirs of the Roman Empire (Goetz 1958).

Leaving aside the later developments and turning back to the earlier traditions, it is clear that both the Book of Daniel and the classical tradition conflated Assyria (prominent in Greek tradition) with Babylonia (prominent in Jewish tradition), created a fictional Median Empire that did not exist (at least, not in terms of a territorial empire similar to the Persian one), and completely ignored Elam (the true forerunner of Persia). Such confusion, coupled with the Book of Daniel's status as a "prophetic" text, is the reason why the identifications suggested above for the passages in the Book of Daniel are hypothetical (even though probable). The same caution should also be exercised with the later Sibylline Oracles and other classical or post-classical sources. Nonetheless, modern scholars have traditionally adopted the erroneous classical sequence, beginning with Rawlinson's bestseller from 1862–67, which detailed five "Oriental" empires (Chaldea, Assyria, Babylonia, Media, and Persia) and was expanded in 1876 to span seven empires, including the post-Achaemenid Parthian and Sasanian Empires. This remained the accepted sequence among scholars until further archaeological and textual material came to light.

With this fresh evidence in hand, scholars began to revisit the issue of *translatio imperii* and to postulate a basic sequence of Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia – accepting, as Herodotus had, that Assyria played the role of the first empire, and replacing the Median "Empire" with Babylonia. But, instead of expanding the succession of empires later in time as earlier scholars had done with Rome and Byzantium, Assyriologists were tempted to look backwards in time for a predecessor to the Assyrian Empire. A full set of kingdoms were (and still are) labeled as "empires." The list includes not only reasonable candidates, like the Old Akkadian and the Ur III state, but also polities devoid of an imperialistic ideology, such as the Hittite kingdom, as well as the early periods of what would only later become empires, like the

Old Assyrian or the Old Babylonian eras. Egyptologists used the term “empire” to denote the New Kingdom, but not the previous phases (the Old and Middle Kingdoms).

Clearly, the idea of *translatio imperii* was based on the concept that there was only one “empire” at a time. The practical as well as ideological implications of this reasoning will be investigated in the discussion below.

World Empires: Size vs. “Mission”

When put on a modern map, the assumed “world empires” of Assyria or Persia (not to speak of Akkad or Ur III) appear to be so small that the terms “world empire” or “universal empire” seem almost ridiculous. The label “regional empires” would be much more appropriate because their sphere of influence was limited to the Near East (or even only a part of it) and because of the possibility that other empires existed at the same time (China being an obvious candidate). We have to consider, however, that “world empire” is also an ideological notion.

First of all, calling an ancient empire “universal” need not indicate that it ruled the entire globe as we know it now, but, if anything, that it had spread throughout the *oikoumene* as known in its own time. In this sense, the Assyrian empire could claim to be “universal.” The Assyrian “mental map” essentially comprised Mesopotamia, the alluvium of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, the mountains to the northeast, the deserts to the southwest, and the all-encircling ocean that appeared at its upper end as the eastern Mediterranean Sea and, at its lower end, as the Persian Gulf. The conquest of the entire territory stretching from the Upper to the Lower Sea, including their main islands, Cyprus and Dilmun, was considered a reasonable accomplishment for a universal dominion (see “Sargon’s Geography,” in Liverani 1999–2001). Lands that remained outside of the empire, such as the Zagros highlands and the Arabian desert, could be easily discarded as “empty” lands, and the people who lived there classified as uncivilized, more properly belonging to the borders of the world than its constitutive parts. The real problems were important polities like Elam and Egypt. Attempts to incorporate them into the empire proved difficult but were nonetheless undertaken for ideological purposes.

The ideological underpinnings of the “universal empire” are highly significant. An empire becomes universal not (only) because of its size, but because of its “mission” to dominate the entire known world, a mission entrusted to the emperor by a god. This remains the qualifying feature when we compare empires to other polities that were perhaps not smaller in a purely

material sense but were devoid of such a mission – in other terms, of such an ideology. Imperial ideology and its role in the Neo-Assyrian Period therefore needs to be discussed here at some length.

Enlarging Assyria

The basic principle of Assyrian kingship is expressed in the recurrent statement that “(the god) Assur is king, and PN (the ruler in charge) is his delegate (*iššiakku*).” This statement is attested at the very beginning of Assyrian history – when Ashur was just a city-state – in the seal inscriptions of Šilulu (ca. 2000 BCE) and Erišum I (ca. 1940) (Grayson 1987: 12–13 and 21) and, later, during the Middle Assyrian period – when Assyria was a regional state – in the Assyrian coronation ritual (ca. 1300 BCE; Müller 1937: 8–9). At the height of the empire, the coronation ritual of Assurbanipal preserves the same idea of the king as the god’s delegate (Livingstone 1989: 26). The idea that the king was the representative or the human agent of the god was quite widespread in the ancient Near East – the very term *iššiakku* derives from the title *ensi* used by the rulers of the Sumerian city-states of the third millennium. But unlike some kings in earlier periods, no Assyrian ruler ever considered himself divine. Assyrian kings were merely the mortal representatives of their “national” god Assur.

The idea of divine rule is not, in itself, a sufficient prerequisite for an imperial ideology. Throughout the history of the ancient Near East, people were conscious that beside their own “city god” existed other gods in other cities. These other gods were not “lesser gods” but rather gods of equal standing, each of them responsible for the fortunes or misfortunes of their respective cities. In other terms, in a polytheistic culture, beliefs in divine rule were fully compatible with a multi-centered political world.

For reasons that we shall explore below, the political theology of Assyria changed around the mid-second millennium BCE. The basic mission of the Assyrian king, entrusted to him by the god Assur, was now no longer limited (as in other cities) to ensuring the well-being of the subjects, the prosperity of the country, and the care of the temples, but also included the peculiar task of *māta ruppūšu*, “to enlarge the country (of Assyria),” i.e. to extend Assyria’s borders, and, in practical terms, to conquer the surrounding countries and peoples. The royal title *murappiṣ mišri* “enlarger of the territory” is first attested with Tukulti-Ninurta I in the late 13th century (Seux 1967: 239). The principle is not exceptional; it can also be found in Egypt, especially under the 18th dynasty. In theological terms, the reasons for “enlarging the country” have to do with a different quality of the inner country versus that of the outer lands, and, ultimately, with a different appreciation of the national god versus the deities in charge of the surrounding peoples.

Only the inner country, dependent as it was on the divine mandate, was a “cosmic” country where law and order, justice, and peace were to be ensured. The outer countries were a “chaotic” part of the universe, lacking the positive qualities of the inner country because they were unaware of, or, worse, resistant to the supreme rule of the central and supreme god, Assur in the case of Assyria. The divine mandate of “enlarging the country,” “extending the border,” and transforming chaos into cosmos, was, therefore, an almost superhuman task, an act of organizing the world, a completion of creation. The conquest of the world added to the glory of Assur and the Assyrian king, but was also to the advantage of the conquered peoples, who were finally inserted – they too! – into the cosmos that was governed by divine rule. The statement in the Middle Assyrian coronation ritual, “by your right scepter enlarge your land! May Assur give you authority and obedience, justice and peace” (Müller 1937: 12–13), is quite explicit in this sense, and the titles “enlarger of the country/of the border” are as frequent in Assyrian royal titulary as they are absent in previous Mesopotamian traditions, where the ambition of a world domain “from sea to sea” was present but expressed differently.

Prerequisites of the Imperial Project

While the theological foundations of Assyrian state ideology are clear, the historical conditions that transformed Assyria into an empire are not so easily discerned. We have to distinguish between two different stages, a first one providing certain prerequisites, and a second stage bringing about the actualization of the imperial project. Until well into the second half of the second millennium BCE, we can only speak of prerequisites. They include (1) the old trade network (attested since the 20th century) stretching across quite a large area, which led previous scholars to speak of an “Old Assyrian Empire” – but the network was largely based on private initiative with limited political backing from the mother-city; (2) the Assyrian “obsidional complex” (the idea of constantly being under siege), best expressed in a prayer of Tukulti-Ninurta I (Foster 1993, I: 230–5) inciting Assyrians to react to the pressure from the surrounding mountaineers; it explains the bellicose attitude of the Assyrians, but the justification of empire building as a reaction against surrounding enemies is, of course, ancient ideology, not our modern historical explanation; (3) the model provided by the tradition of the Old Akkadian Empire, already revived by Šamši-Adad I in the 18th century – but his kingdom included the entirety of Upper Mesopotamia and was mainly based outside of Assyria.

The first opportunity to develop a policy of expansion and, hence, a kind of imperial ideology, occurred in 1360 with the collapse of the kingdom of Mittani (or: Mitanni), which encompassed all of Upper Mesopotamia, from

the Zagros Mountain range to the Mediterranean Sea coast. Although the collapse of Mittani was the result of the intervention of the Hittite king Šuppiluliuma, the Assyrian king Aššur-uballiṭ was able to profit from the opportunity as well, launching attacks that would be continued by his successors, finally expanding the western border of Assyria to the Euphrates River and transforming Ashur from a city-state into a regional kingdom.

During the period between 1350 and 1200, Assyria became part of an international network of states that was based upon the peaceful coexistence, or, rather, the careful balancing of the political and military interests of a half-dozen “great kings” – the rulers of Egypt, Ḫatti, Assyria (the heir of Mittani), Babylonia, Elam, and some partners of uncertain rank (Alašiya, Aḫiyawa, and Arzawa). While most of the states in this system of “peer-polity interaction” accepted the ideas of compromise and reciprocity promoted by the partners, the late-comer Assyria adopted a more aggressive attitude, provoking negative reactions from older members like Ḫatti and Babylonia. In this system, Egypt too had always played a peculiar role, accepting “peer interaction” in the form of gift exchange while also maintaining a certain sense of superiority. Is it possible that Assyria found the inspiration for adopting the titles and the very concept of “enlarging the border” (*murappiṣ mišri* in the Assyrian titulary, *swšḫ t3šw* in the Egyptian) as a divine mandate in Egyptian royal ideology? This is merely speculation, but it seems clear that the Hittite model, too adherent to the juridical rules of reciprocity and interaction, and the model of Babylon, which had fallen into a state of crisis, would have been much less appealing to the ambitious kings of Ashur.

Regardless of the tensions between the powers, the international system remained in function until the early 12th century BCE, when the Sea People’s invasion (among other possible factors) brought about its collapse, especially in the west. The eastern partners managed to resist the ensuing fragmentation for another century (the century of Tiglath-pileser I in Assyria, Nebuchadnezzar I in Babylonia, and Šilḫak-Inšušinak in Elam), only to be eventually affected by the crisis as well. By the end of this process, Egypt had withdrawn into its traditional borders, Ḫatti had disappeared, Anatolia and the entire Levant were mostly deurbanized, Babylonia underwent a serious decline, Elam became segregated from the Near Eastern heartland, and Upper Mesopotamia was invaded by Aramaean tribes. Assyria itself experienced a serious crisis (1070–930 BCE), but it was the first to recover its energies and its willingness to expand, finding no serious rivals or resistance in Lower Mesopotamia or in the Levant. As the only major power left in a world slowly recovering but still split up into a plurality of city-states and tribal leagues, Assyria could carry out her program of enlarging the central kingdom at the expense of the periphery relatively easily, eventually placing the entire *oikoumene* under the banner (or rather the yoke) of Assur.

The Assyrian imperial conquest was not a continuous process, however, and it

underwent various stages: (1) a period of “*Reconquista*” (930–860 BCE), regaining the territory that was already Assyrian in the 13th century; (2) the first expansion beyond the traditional borders (860–830 BCE), with Shalmaneser III achieving the submission (but not annexation) of most of the Levant; (3) a “feudal” period (830–745 BCE), with provincial governors challenging the central power and Assyrian expansion coming to a temporary halt; (4) a second expansion (745–705 BCE), with Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II conquering (and annexing) most of the surrounding territories and thus giving the empire its ‘classical’ structure; (5) a period of unchallenged hegemony (705–640 BCE), with the Assyrian kings even venturing to campaign against very distant regions (Arabia, Egypt, and Elam), although with mixed results; (6) and, finally, a civil war that culminated in a sudden collapse (640–610 BCE) (for details, see [Chapter 8](#)). In sum, Assyria’s imperial ideology was promoted for some seven centuries (c. 1300–600 BCE in round figures), but a truly universal (i.e. hegemonic in the known *oikoumene*) Assyrian empire lasted for a much shorter period of time, from the mid-ninth to mid-seventh centuries.

Imperial Practice and Theory

The establishment of “cosmic” order at the expense of chaos came about in various ways, both material and ideological. Conquests led, for instance, to a purely physical transformation of the landscape: roads were opened through previously impassable mountains, wells were dug to provide water for desert travelers, and uncultivated lands were transformed into productive fields – in the words of Sargon II, “to resettle abandoned regions, to break up fallow lands, to plant orchards, to raise crops on slopes so steep that no vegetation had ever flourished before, to set out plants in waste lands that had never known the plough under previous kings, to cut seed furrows, to let work songs resound, I let the springs of the plain flow, and abundant water rise high” (Fuchs 1993: 37 and 292).

Although such physical, environmental efforts are repeatedly mentioned, Assyrian royal inscriptions devote more attention to law and order than to landscape. Enemies not yet defeated are characterized in two ways: they were either people (like the desert tribes or the mountaineers) who had never experienced a state administration, the presence of officials, taxation, and corvée work, or (in the case of more developed countries) they did have a king, a royal palace, a state structure, but not the “right” ones, because they did not originate from the unique source of legitimate power, the god Assur. The chaotic nature of the enemies was evident from their very plurality (dozens and dozens of Nairi kings, Aramaean tribes, Chaldean cities, and Elamite lands), which stood in contrast to the unitedness of Assyria under the

Assyrian king. The enemies were foolish to trust in their mutual support, in their numbers, and in the hostile landscape, whereas the Assyrian king trusted only in Assur, which was enough to prevail over enemies who had no god, or merely lesser gods who ultimately abandoned them to their fates.

In both tribal and urbanized polities, the Assyrian mandate to create order was fulfilled by submitting the conquered people to the Assyrian “yoke”: *nīr Aššur* (or *nīr bēlūti*) *emēdu* (or *kunnu*), “to impose the yoke of Assur (or: the yoke of the (king’s) lordship)” is a metaphor hinting at taxation and forced labor. The same concept is more directly expressed by the idiom *biltu maddattu kī ša aššurī emēdu*, “to impose tax and tribute like on the Assyrians,” and the idiom *itti niše māṭ Aššur manû* “to count with the people of Assyria” hints at the enrollment of the conquered people into the list of taxpayers as well. Without a concept of citizenship, the major (or, the only) requirement to “become Assyrian” was to fulfill one’s fiscal responsibilities.

It is interesting to note that another prevailing idiom, *pâ ištēn šakānu*, literally, “to make (everyone) of one mouth” does not denote a unification of language but rather a unification under one command – the mouth being that of the conqueror, not of the conquered people. A passage of Sargon II, a true and proper manifesto of Assyrian imperialism, is rather explicit in this sense: “people of the four regions, of foreign tongue and untranslatable idioms, dwellers of mountains and lands ... I had them submit to a unified command (*pâ ištēn ušaškin*) and settled them therein (= in the new capital city of Dur-Šarrukin). Assyrians, competent in every craft, I sent to them as overseers and supervisors to teach them the (correct) behavior and the fear of god and king” (Fuchs 1993: 79–80 and 311). Since the passage starts with a reference to the diversity of languages, one expects that the Assyrian overseers would teach the deportees the one language, i.e. Assyrian; instead, the Assyrians teach them “to fear god and king” (*palāḥ ili u šarri*), i.e. obedience, and to understand the correct working procedures. Ironically, the linguistic landscape of the Assyrian empire would indeed become increasingly unified, but not because the conquered peoples would eventually learn Assyrian, but rather because the Assyrians themselves ended up speaking the language of most deportees, i.e. Aramaic.

Destruction and Reconstruction

The transformation of chaos into cosmos unfolds in two phases: first, the old disorder must be eliminated, and then (and only then) the new order created. The royal inscriptions are filled with descriptions of the first, destructive step, often expressed using the recurrent phrase *appul aqqur ašrup* “I razed, I destroyed, I burnt.” Every campaign report is a narrative of destruction, slaughters, and sadistic cruelty. Control over foreigners was based mainly on

terror, as properly stated by Sargon II: “I established the power of Assur for all days to come; I left for the future a fear of him (= Assur), never to be forgotten” (Mayer 1983: 82–3 [152]). The most effective feature of terror is its long-term ideological effect (you kill one to educate one thousand); but destruction could also cause permanent physical effects that added to the fearsome reputation of the Assyrians, as Esarhaddon states when describing the progress of his army: “before me cities, behind me tells (i.e. heaps of ruins)” (Leichty, RINAP 4: 184 [rev. 13]; cf. Frahm 2006: 93). As for the sadistic displays of cruelty (the descriptions and depictions of enemies being tortured, mutilated, impaled, flayed, and buried alive), it is commonly assumed that these were intended to terrify the enemies, which is partly true, but an additional aim was to encourage the pack mentality of the Assyrians themselves. In general, effective armies (be it in order to bring freedom or despotism) need to be reassured on two points in wartime: firstly, that the soldiers will not die, and, secondly, that it is not their fault if they have to kill other men. With regard to the first point, it is worth quoting from the “letters to Assur,” which describe the triumphal conclusion of a military campaign with the standard statement: “one charioteer, two horsemen, three foot-soldiers died” (Mayer 1983: 112–13 [426]; Leichty, RINAP 4: 85 [iv 13’]) – thus reducing the number of casualties from the more realistic thousands to a mere handful. Regarding the second point, the royal inscriptions consistently describe the enemies as wicked and stubbornly resistant to accepting the beneficial lordship of Assur, madly running towards a punishment and a death that is no one’s fault but their own.

But destruction was not the end goal of conquest, merely a necessary preliminary action. The final aim was reconstruction, in the image to the positive qualities of the center. After the noncompliant local leaders were eliminated, Assyrian governors were appointed, often eunuchs (*šūt rēšīya bēl pīḫāti ana muḫḫišunu aškun*); after the palace of the local king was destroyed, an Assyrian palace was built in its place; and after the local population was deported, new people were settled in their place. In addition, local names were sometimes replaced with new, Assyrian ones. The basic idiom for this complex of actions is *āla/māta ana eššūte šabātu* “to renovate the (conquered) city (or: country),” and it is interesting to observe that, in the ninth century (under Aššurnāšīrpal II), the idiom refers to building activities, while in the eighth century (under Sargon II), it refers to incoming deportees – the conquered country is “renovated” after its population has been exchanged.

As described above, emphasis was placed on fiscal assimilation especially: people “became Assyrian” when they became subject to taxation and forced labor. Since the theological principle was that the conquered peoples would have to accept the rule of the god Assur and his human representative, the Assyrian king, one could expect that they were forced to dismiss their own gods and accept the cult of Assur, but this was not so. True, the “weapon of

Assur” (*kakki* ^d*Aššur*) was erected within conquered cities, but only as a symbol for their oath of loyalty (Holloway 2001). In addition, an image of the king was occasionally erected. The cult images of the local gods were very rarely destroyed; they were more often “captured” and “deported” to Assyria (to signal the abandonment of their countries) and returned later, in some cases refurbished and with an Assyrian inscription added. Special attention was reserved for the Babylonian gods and their temples, but this was an exceptional case dictated by the cultural prestige of Babylon. Religion within the Assyrian Empire remained polytheistic, with foreign gods accepted and, in some cases, identified with Assyrian ones. Monotheism was the eventual result of a new moral conception of the divine, not of the elimination of the rival, lesser gods.

The desired end result of the destruction and subsequent reconstruction of the conquered country was peace, even though proclaiming peace at the end of destruction and slaughter could occasionally seem rather paradoxical. Note, for instance, Sargon’s statement: “The city Qarqar I burnt, him (= the king) I flayed, inside the towns I killed the rebels, and (so) I established peace (*sulummû*)” (Fuchs 1993: 201 [Prunk. 35]). But in Assyrian passages of this kind there is no irony, intentional or otherwise. The elimination of the “rebels” was a necessary step toward a unified, homogeneous, and pacified world. We cannot avoid remembering Tacitus’s famous criticism (from the mouth of a Briton chief) of the official proclamations of the Roman Empire: “where they make a waste, they call it peace” (*Agricola* 30).

The Advantages of Direct Rule

In theory, the empire should have spread continuously and homogeneously in all directions, since each king was obligated to fulfill the divine mandate to “enlarge the country.” In practical terms, however, the growth of the empire was neither constant through time (as we have seen above) nor homogeneous in its political and administrative practices. The reasons for the existence of different political structures within the empire were essentially twofold: first, limitations of technology and second, the large variety of local patterns, dictated, to a fair extent, by environmental constraints.

The limitations in transportation and communication technology generally prevented profitable exportation of basic resources (especially food) beyond a range of 20–25 kilometers. In ancient times, a “cantonal” structure was the standard module for polities and was rarely surpassed. The enlargement of a kingdom or empire was, therefore, achieved not by extending the central cell but rather by adding more and more modules to it; in other words, by establishing provinces that remained autonomous in the management of their resources and forwarded any surplus goods, either processed or converted into

silver or other precious items, to the central capital city.

Another means by which the Assyrians dealt with practical constraints hindering the expansion of their control was to leave vanquished kingdoms to native rulers, usually new, pro-Assyrian ones who took the place of the wicked, rebellious rulers just eliminated. This practice of “indirect rule” was an often used alternative to provincial annexation or “direct rule.” In economic terms, indirect rule was not necessarily less profitable than direct rule: what worked better depended upon the amount of (external) tribute as compared to (internal) taxes. Indirect rule could even prove more convenient, because it was better suited to keep internal productivity high, avoiding the risks of low morale and depopulation brought about by flight and deportation. Yet, in the long run, the empire preferred direct rule wherever possible. The reasons were not economic but rather political: direct rule meant eliminating the local political elites (by either killing or deporting them) and diluting the local identity of the lower classes (through two-way deportations), which discouraged attempts at rebellion and secession.

When looking at the two types of rule from a diachronic perspective, we can distinguish two phases in the historical development of the Assyrian Empire. In the ninth century, the empire comprised a core area that was ruled directly and was more or less identical with the Middle Assyrian regional kingdom – it extended from the Zagros Mountains to the Middle Euphrates River region. Indirect rule, in contrast, was practiced throughout a periphery of tributary kingdoms that were reached by the Assyrian army during their seasonal campaigns, which could not go beyond one thousand kilometers. In the eighth and seventh centuries, direct rule was extended to the formerly tributary areas, and indirect rule was pushed increasingly farther outwards.

But in the mountains, the steppe, and the desert, where no urban structure had ever developed and no redistributive agencies (such as palaces) were in operation, it proved impossible to apply direct rule. As a consequence, these regions could never be fully conquered. To cite just one example, when Assyria, under Sennacherib, dominated an enormously large territory, the king was, nonetheless, forced to go on a campaign a few miles up the Tigris River in order to punish the insubordinate mountaineers of the Judi Dag (Frahm 1997: 150–1). In such marginal environments, tribes and chiefdoms that had never developed kingdoms of their own could not be transformed into provinces. Likewise, the provinces that Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II tried to establish in Media quickly reverted to chiefdoms with “city-lords” installed in castles surrounded by the tents of the pastoralists. Assyrian rule in this region was based on personal relations between a patron and his clients (to use terminology of Roman origin), who provided gifts rather than tribute and supplied soldiers and bodyguards rather than a workforce.

In this way, the periphery remained, of course, to some extent within the sphere of chaos, not of order, a dangerous situation that would prove fatal at

the moment of the final collapse of the Assyrian Empire, when hordes of mountaineers descended from the Zagros Mountains to destroy the “despotic” state. Yet the *translatio imperii* would not bring the Median tribes to power but rather Babylon under Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar II. Their “second” empire may have tried to learn a few things from the example of the fallen Assyrian state. The royal inscriptions of the Chaldean kings, for example, do not mention the destructive aspects of their imperial mission, describing building and cultic activities instead. The “third” empire, that of the Persians, even allowed some groups of deportees to return to their original homelands. The prototypical empire of Assyria, in contrast, represented an extreme and unabashed form of despotism, not yet mollified by the insight that more sophisticated political practices and more subtle ideological messages might better serve the imperial mission.

A final remark: problems in Assyria did not first arise in the periphery. At the very center of the empire, within the Assyrian royal palace itself, where peace and order should have existed, negative, chaotic events occurred with increasing frequency – murders of kings, plots and irregular successions, treachery by courtiers, and harem conspiracies (Liverani 2009). The last Assyrian kings seemed more concerned with surviving internal dangers than with running the affairs of the world, an additional reason why the rise of an empire is a long and difficult process, while its collapse can take place in a moment (Liverani 2008).

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PART IV

The Afterlife and Rediscovery of Assyria

CHAPTER 28

Assyria in Late Babylonian Sources

Paul-Alain Beaulieu

After the demise of the Assyrian state at the end of the seventh century BCE, Babylon, its long time rival and cultural sibling, emerged as hegemonic power in Mesopotamia and the Levant. After Babylon in turn lost its independence to the Persians in 539, Babylonian temples became the main repository of the cultural memory of Mesopotamia. Late Babylonian cuneiform documentation is remarkably rich and varied. The Babylonian empire of the seventh and sixth centuries has produced an important corpus of official inscriptions. Archival documents, concentrated mostly in the period from 626 to 485, can be counted in tens of thousands. Temple and private libraries dating to the Seleucid and Parthian period include hundreds of manuscripts of traditional texts, ranging from lexical and omen series to chronicles and works of literature. This rich and varied corpus preserves selective memories of Assyria as political and cultural competitor, as well as isolated elements of Assyrian culture which survived for centuries on Babylonian soil. These sometimes lived on in the form of a self-consciously cultivated legacy, although more often they were completely assimilated to the point that they can be identified only with difficulty and were probably no longer identifiably Assyrian. The picture which emerges from that documentation is inevitably lop-sided, viewing Assyria through the lens of a world centered on Babylon and its cultural, religious, and political achievements. Nevertheless, the evidence shows that Assyria had not been entirely forgotten, at least among the literate classes who controlled the temples and cuneiform learning.

Assyria in the Royal Inscriptions of the Babylonian Empire

Nabopolassar seized the Babylonian throne in 626 BCE. For the next six years he waged war against the Assyrians on Babylonian soil for control of its cities. Places like Uruk and Nippur changed hands a few times, but by 620 all evidence indicates that Nabopolassar had eliminated his rival Sîn-šarru-iškun from the south and was ready to carry the conflict to Assyria proper (Beaulieu 1997a). The Babylonians and their Median allies sacked Nineveh in 612, but it is only with the capture of Ḫarran in 609 that the long history of the Assyrian state and its monarchy came to a close. The Assyrian collapse was

dramatic. In spite of evidence of partial occupation and some later resettlement, the vast imperial capitals and royal residences of the Sargonid kings became largely deserted. Assyrian cuneiform disappeared along with the state that supported it, while the progress of Aramaic as vernacular had already narrowed its usage, especially for the recording of private transactions. The sole post-Assyrian evidence for the survival of the Assyrian language and the Assyrian cuneiform script in an everyday context comes in the form of four economic documents from Dur-Katlimmu dated to the fourth year of Nebuchadnezzar II, 601–600 BCE (Postgate 1993; Brinkman 1993).

The years of struggle between Nabopolassar and the waning Assyrian state witnessed the emergence of a Babylonian discourse about Assyria which shaped the memory of that state in late Babylonian historiography. Nabopolassar alludes to the Assyrian demise in a few inscriptions. In his cylinder commemorating the restoration of the wall Imgur-Enlil in Babylon (Al-Rawi 1985), the new king describes the Assyrians as oppressors who had been allowed to rule Babylonia in an illegitimate manner because of divine wrath until he threw them out of the country and helped the Babylonians cast off their yoke. In the conclusion of this inscription, Nabopolassar contrasts Assyrian cruelty and trust in sheer might with his own passive faith in the power of Marduk and Nabû, drawing an ethical lesson from the failure of the Assyrian imperial system which recalls similar moral condemnations voiced by Biblical prophets (Beaulieu 2003b).

The greatest Assyrian crime in the Babylonian view was the treatment doled out by Sennacherib to their city after its capture in 689. Although Nabopolassar does not mention these particular events in his inscriptions, there is little doubt that during his reign, the Babylonians began to view the unfolding disintegration and fall of Assyria as retribution for the crimes of Sennacherib against their city. This view seems implicit in a Babylonian Chronicle which covers interruptions in the New Year Festival from the time of Sennacherib's sack of Babylon down to the year 626, when Nabopolassar assumed power in Babylonia following the demise of Kandalanu (Glassner 2004, Chronicle 20). The same explanation occurs, this time fully spelled out, in a stele set up at Babylon by Nabonidus not long after his accession to the throne. The first lines are lost and probably mentioned Sennacherib by name. The preserved parts describe his evil deeds against the sacred city, his desecration of the site and neglect of cult centers, as well as the forced exile to Ashur which he imposed on the god Marduk. The narrative continues with the routine theological explanation that it is Marduk, in his anger, who had allowed Sennacherib to succeed in his scheme, and ends with the return of the god to Esagil in Babylon after an exile of twenty-one years. Nabonidus adds that, as punishment, Marduk incited the son of Sennacherib, now designated as "king of Subartu," to murder him (Schaudig 2001: 516). Nabonidus also mentions the desecration committed against the Eulmaš temple of Sippar-

Anunitum, although this time he attributes to the god Sîn the guiding hand in the unfolding of the drama (Schaudig 2001: 457).

These dramatic events are also recalled in two fragmentary texts from Babylon dating to the Hellenistic period which record an alleged exchange of correspondence between Nabopolassar and Sîn-šarru-iškun detailing the main rationale invoked by the insurgent Babylonian king to wage war against Assyria (Gerardi 1986; Lambert 2005). They again portray Sennacherib as the desecrator of Babylon and Nabopolassar as the “avenger of Akkad,” selected by Marduk to bring an end to Assyrian rule and vindicate the holy city. These two literary letters indicate that the motif of retribution for Sennacherib’s sin as explanation for the fall of Assyria and the rise of Babylon as imperial power survived in Babylonian historiography until the Seleucid era.

The fact that the Babylonians resorted to an alliance with the Medes to destroy Assyria meant that the two powers could equally claim the Assyrian inheritance, and in fact for a long time historians doubted that the Babylonian kings laid any serious claim to the former core of Assyria. Manuscripts of inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar which have surfaced in the past few years have put this notion to rest. Some inscriptions mention Assyria by name as a province of Nebuchadnezzar’s realm and contrast it with Akkad (i.e. Babylonia); alternatively they refer to Assyria as “Subartu,” and to Babylonia as “Sumer and Akkad” (Vanderhooft 1999: 38; Da Riva 2008: 20–3). Nebuchadnezzar presumably claimed control of historical Assyria with a view to exert kingship over all of Mesopotamia, not only Babylonia and its Levantine possessions.

One fact must be noted: no Assyrian king is mentioned by name in the inscriptions of Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar, and the latter’s immediate successors. With Nabonidus, however, we witness an abrupt change. Not only does the last king of Babylon allude directly to the unholy acts of Sennacherib, but he also mentions in his inscriptions the Neo-Assyrian kings Shalmaneser III and his father Aššurnāṣirpal II, Esarhaddon, Assurbanipal, and Aššur-etel-ilani. In all cases he carefully identifies these rulers with the title “king of Assyria” (*šar māt Aššur*). In most cases these references are found in the context of temple rebuilding and the discovery of foundation deposits of these kings at Ḫarran, in the Eḫulḫul temple (Schaudig 2001: 418–19), and at Akkad, in the Eulmaš temple (Schaudig 2001: 454). Other references occur in the account of the life of Adad-guppi on her funerary stele from Ḫarran, which was also composed in the context of the rebuilding of Eḫulḫul (Schaudig 2001: 503). In his stele from Babylon, Nabonidus mentions the cylinder seal with a depiction of Sîn which Assurbanipal had deposited in the Esagil temple and which probably provided the features of the renewed image of the moon god of Ḫarran (Schaudig 2001: 522; Lee 1993). It seems obvious that Nabonidus, whose roots may have been partly Assyrian through his mother, had a vested interest in linking his rule to that of

the Sargonids.

Assyria in Everyday Documents

The memory of Assyria did not live on solely in the royal scriptoria. Neo- and Late Babylonian archival texts contain thousands of personal names. Some of these names contain the name of the god Assur as theophoric element, but are linguistically Babylonian. They may have been popular among descendants of Assyrian families transplanted in Babylonia. Some of the best evidence for such names comes from sixth century Uruk, where a colony of Assyrians was very probably resettled in the seventh century and was still operating a temple of Assur (written AN.ŠĀR) in the sixth century (Beaulieu 1997b). Several texts from the Eanna temple archive record deliveries of commodities for the offerings in that temple of Assur, and one text in particular (UCP 9/2, 57) lists members of the college of brewers and bakers officiating in the sanctuary of Assur whose names are in some cases not only theologically, but also linguistically Assyrian (e.g. Pani-Aššur-lamur). The text also refers to these priestly servants as men of Libbi-ali, a common designation of the city of Ashur in Assyrian sources. The designation AN.ŠĀR is the only one attested for this god in the Eanna temple archive, which suggests that their arrival at Uruk postdated the theological reforms of Sennacherib and the systematic adoption of that name for Assur. It is probably no coincidence that a high official of the Eanna temple during the early reign of Assurbanipal bore the name Aššur-bel-ušur (¹AN.ŠĀR-EN-ÛRI), a name which seems highly unusual for a Babylonian, especially a temple functionary. These texts constitute the only solid evidence we have for the importation of the cult of Assur in Babylonia and its survival after the fall of Nineveh.

Assyria in the View of the Persians

With the advent of Persian rule, cuneiform became confined largely to the temples and the private sphere. The Achaemenid rulers ceased to sponsor building inscriptions in the traditional Babylonian style. The most notable exception is the Cyrus Cylinder, which in principle commemorates repairs on the defensive walls of Babylon, yet stands out more plainly as an apology for the Persian takeover. The Cylinder lashes out at the defeated Babylonian king Nabonidus and mentions the discovery of a foundation deposit of the Assyrian king Assurbanipal during the repair work (Kuhrt 2007: 70–4). The intent of this juxtaposition seems obvious. Cyrus, having deposed an illegitimate ruler and destroyed the short-lived Babylonian empire, now posed as direct continuator of the Assyrians. The seeds were sowed for the eradication of

imperial Babylon from the historical memory of the ancient world. This process culminated in the fourth century with the works of the Greek physician Ctesias, who propagated the Persian view that their empire had been the natural successor of the Assyrian one, Babylon being essentially a foundation of the Assyrian queen Semiramis. Later, in the first decades of the third century, the Babylonian priest Berossus, in his account of the history of Babylon written in Greek and dedicated to the Seleucid ruler Antiochus I, described the architectural achievements of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II in Babylon and criticized the Greeks for attributing these works to Semiramis (Verbrugghe and Wickersham 1999: 59, no. 142). He also implicitly tried to overturn the Ctesian narrative which ignored the Babylonian empire as successor state to Assyria (Beaulieu 2007: 136–8). Berossus, however, enjoyed a limited audience, and his contribution to historiography circulated mostly among Jewish writers and the Church Fathers.

Hellenistic Babylonia Remembers Assyria

The Hellenistic period witnessed a revival of Babylonian civilization, now confined largely to the temples and the social groups that gravitated around them. The sanctuaries of Uruk and Babylon, and in some cases the private homes of priests and scholars, have generated libraries with hundreds of manuscripts of traditional cuneiform texts. A few of these texts preserve Assyrian material or memories of Assyria in various forms. At Uruk we have evidence for the preservation of Assyrian textual traditions (Beaulieu 2010). SpTU II 46, which contains part of the commentary to Tablet 42 of the series *bārûtu*, is unique in many respects; it is written in the Neo-Assyrian script and bears a colophon of the library of Assurbanipal (Type L). The text had probably been kept as heirloom in a learned family. Another example is SpTU II 31, a fragmentary text inscribed with a prayer mentioning Assurbanipal and with part of a royal inscription, possibly of that same king. Other scholarly texts appear to adhere to manuscript traditions that are specifically Ninevite, or specific to other Assyrian centers of learning. This is true not only for hepatoscopy, but also for the field of astrology. Recent studies of the manuscript tradition of the astrological series *Enūma Anu Enlil* have determined that, in some ways, the late Uruk scriptoria followed a Ninevite tradition in the numbering of the tablets, as well as Assyrian traditions in the recension of specific portions of the series (Fincke 2001; Beaulieu 2010: 11–12). One must recognize, however, that late Uruk scholars may not necessarily have realized that these manuscript traditions originated in Assyria. Yet, the list of antediluvian *apkallus* and historical *ummānus* discovered in the library of the Reš temple contained a powerful reminder of the importance of Assyria in the intellectual history of Mesopotamia, as it

paired the legendary sage Ahiqar with the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (Van Dijk and Mayer 1980, no. 89). At any rate, the presence of at least one completely Assyrian manuscript (SpTU II 46) proves that some scholars of Hellenistic Uruk cultivated an awareness of the Assyrian past and its culture. The evidence, discussed above, that Assyrians had come to Uruk in the seventh century to organize the cult of Assur leads us to speculate that still, in the Hellenistic period, local scholars influenced by that imported tradition traced their intellectual pedigree back to Assyria.

A somewhat different outlook prevailed at Babylon and Borsippa. There too, local scriptoria preserved memories of Sargonid Assyria as center of power, and of Nineveh as intellectual storehouse. Three literary letters relate to Assurbanipal's requisition of tablets for the royal libraries of Nineveh: BM 45642 records the reply to Assurbanipal's request by the scholars of Borsippa; BM 28825 a similar reply by the scholars of Babylon, while CT 22, 1 preserves a direct order by Assurbanipal to the authorities of Borsippa to collect tablets from private houses and the Ezida temple (Frame and George 2005). The manuscripts cannot be precisely dated but probably come from the Hellenistic period in their majority, although they seem to reproduce much older traditions. The question of the authenticity of the letters cannot be solved satisfactorily. Like the two letters between Nabopolassar and Sîn-šarru-iškun, they fall within the genre of "royal correspondence," which may contain factual threads but was later considerably embellished for exemplary purposes. Nonetheless, their general context seems entirely plausible since we have extensive evidence from the seventh century for Assurbanipal's collecting activities in Babylonia (Parpola 1983). One important aspect of the Babylon and Borsippa tradition is their reductive view of Nineveh as recipient of Babylonian knowledge, contrary to the situation at Uruk where the channel of transmission was acknowledged as having gone in the other direction. One possible reason for this divergence is that the library of the Esagil temple may have functioned as a royal library already under Assyrian rule, as it probably did afterwards (Clancier 2009: 306–7).

Memories of Assyria also survived in Chronicles. The majority of manuscripts of Babylonian Chronicles can be assigned to the late Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods and belonged to the libraries of Babylon, chiefly the Esagil, although some may have come from Borsippa. These Chronicles focus on Babylonian history exclusively and, with only a few exceptions, mention Assyrians only insofar as they intervened in Babylonian affairs. Nevertheless, they contain a non-negligible amount of information on Assyria and its rulers, especially those who assumed the Babylonian crown. Although the Babylonian chronographic tradition originated in the second millennium, it is only with the reign of Nabû-našir (747–734) that Chronicles began to record systematic information. This is also the period when Assyrian intervention became systemic. Five Chronicles deal with events between 745, the

accession year of Tiglath-pileser III, and the end of Assyrian rule in Babylonia with the advent of Nabopolassar in 626 (Glassner 2004, Chronicles 16–20). They contain a good deal of information on the triangular conflict between Assyria, Elam, and Babylonia in the seventh century. Two of these Chronicles (Glassner 2004, nos. 19–20) focus on interruptions of the New Year festival and, as already mentioned, the latter one seems to draw an implicit connection with Sennacherib's desecration of Babylon and the collapse of Assyrian rule in Babylonia. Two other Chronicles (Glassner 2004, nos. 21–2) detail the events of the reign of Nabopolassar down to the capture of Nineveh, furnishing considerable details on the military operations and political alliances which led to the downfall of Assyria.

Some Chronicles relate the earlier history of Assyrian relations with Babylonia. Two partly overlapping Chronicles (Glassner 2004, nos. 46–7) cover the history of Babylon from the last Kassite rulers down to 822, with some mentions of Assyrian intervention. Of considerable interest is a Chronicle which deals with the conflicts between Assyria, Elam, and Babylonia between the 14th and 12th centuries and draws material from the Assyrian Synchronistic History as well as from unknown sources, possibly an epic in honor of the Kassite king Kurigalzu (Glassner 2004, no. 45). This Chronicle thus preserves in a late Babylonian manuscript what must have been an earlier Babylonian response to claims laid by Assyrian historiographers. Finally, one notes that the Chronicle of Ancient Kings (Glassner 2004, no. 39) ends with a mention that the Old Assyrian king Ilušuma was a contemporary of Suabu (= Sumu-abum) of Babylon. In short, Babylonian scholars of the Hellenistic period had at their disposal a small body of information about Assyria, most of it relating to the Sargonid kings. It is therefore no wonder that Berossus, whose work centers exclusively on the city of Babylon, provides some details on the Assyrian kings of the seventh century, and it may be more than coincidence that these surviving fragments relate almost entirely to Sennacherib, although they do not allude specifically to his crimes against Babylonia (Verbrugghe and Wickersham 1996: 53–6).

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CHAPTER 29

Assyria in the Hebrew Bible

Eckart Frahm

Introduction

During the late Middle Assyrian period and then again in the ninth century BCE, Assyrian armies fought repeatedly against local polities in the Levant, and several Assyrian monarchs were able to boast that they had “washed their weapons” in the Mediterranean Sea. In 853 BCE, king Shalmaneser III went into battle against a large coalition of Levantine states, including Israel, which was ruled at that time by king Ahab, the first Israelite monarch to be mentioned in an Assyrian inscription. But it was only during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BCE) that Assyria began to systematically conquer, subjugate, and annex the states of Western Syria and Palestine, initiating a new, “imperial” phase in the history of Western Asia (for details, see [Chapters 8](#) and [13](#) in this volume).

Both Israel and Judah were thoroughly affected by these new expansionist policies. In 722/720 BCE, Assyria completed the annexation of Israel, which ceased to exist as an independent kingdom. In 701 BCE, Judah, after suffering heavy losses of life and property, became an Assyrian vassal state. These central events, as well as several others, explain why Assyria’s imperial domination and eventual downfall, and the history of the period from roughly 744 to 612 BCE in general, are so prominently reflected in the Hebrew Bible.

One might be inclined to argue that the Biblical authors’ fascination with Assyria is of no more than “historicist” interest. But such a view would overlook something rather crucial: the fact that Assyria’s penetration into the Levant helped initiate and catalyze the “axial” revolution of religious and political thought that is codified in the Bible. To phrase it differently: the emergence of a new religious and “national” identity in Israel and Judah in the wake of Tiglath-pileser’s campaigns to the West can be seen as a direct response to the political and intellectual challenges posed by Assyrian imperialism. Consequently, the following pages will not only discuss the historical references to Assyria found in the Bible, but also the question of Assyria’s impact on the Bible’s legal, theological, and ideological positions.

Terminology

The Assyrians called their main god, his cult city, and the land of Assyria *Aššur*, a term used by the Biblical authors as well. *Aššur* is mentioned in the Bible some 150 times (Vanderhooft 2008: 85), in the books of Genesis, Numbers, 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Psalms, Lamentations, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, and Sirach (for exact references, and additional ones from the War Scroll from Qumran, see Clines 1993: 412–13). It is noteworthy, however, that nowhere in the Bible – except for the personal name “Esarhaddon,” where *Aššur* serves as a theophoric element – are *Aššur* the god or *Aššur* the city mentioned (Frahm 2011: 271–4). Most of the Biblical references designate instead the land of *Aššur*, that is, Assyria, and its people. A typical example is the title *melek Aššur* “king of Assyria.” Attested in the Bible some ninety-one times, it corresponds to Assyrian *šar māt Aššur*.

In a few instances, the Bible assigns the name *Aššur* to an individual who was regarded as Assyria’s founding father or *heros eponymos*. This is most obvious in Gen. 10:22, which lists *Aššur* with Elam, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram among the sons of Shem. Even though some uncertainty remains, the same legendary *Aššur* is probably also mentioned in Gen. 10:11–12, if we translate these lines: “Out of that land (Shinar, i.e., Babylonia) came forth *Aššur* and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir (or: “and the city’s large squares”), Calah, and Resen(?) between Nineveh and Calah; this (Nineveh) is the great city.” Many scholars, both ancient and modern, have understood this difficult and possibly corrupt passage differently, assuming that it ascribes the creation of Assyrian civilization to Nimrod, who is mentioned in the preceding lines (see, most recently, Vanderhooft 2008: 83–4, 89 and van der Kooij 2012: 3–8), but a reference to both Nimrod and *Aššur* in Mic. 5:5–6, and a few other considerations, mitigate against this interpretation (Frahm 2011: 269–71). Either way, there is no Assyrian parallel for this “founding myth,” which demonstrates, incidentally, that the Biblical authors considered Assyria and its main cities very ancient.

History

The Hebrew Bible mentions six Assyrian monarchs by name (for references and discussion, see Millard 1976 and Machinist 1983: 720–2): Tiglath-pileser III (both under this and his second name, Pulu), Shalmaneser V, Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and probably Assurbanipal, provided the “Osnappar” mentioned in Ezra is to be identified with this king. Suggestions that “Shalman” in Hos. 10:14 might refer to Shalmaneser III and that Nimrod is Tukulti-Ninurta I have not found universal acceptance. More likely is the

idea that the unnamed “savior” of 2 Kings 13:5, who allegedly delivered the Israelites “from the hand of the Arameans,” was Adad-nirari III (Ackerman 2010: 129). 2 Kings 19:37 mentions the Assyrian princes Adrammelech and Sharezer, the former of whom can be identified with Sennacherib’s son Urdu-Mullissi (Parpola 1980).

In 2 Kings especially, but also in Isaiah (and, to a lesser degree, in 2 Chronicles), the Bible provides fairly specific accounts of the activities of the aforementioned kings, primarily with regard to events that took place in the Levant. Some of the information found in the historical sections of the Bible seems to derive from the “Chronicle (*sefer divrei hayamim*) of the Kings of Judah” and the “Chronicle of the Kings of Israel,” which are mentioned in various chapters of 1 Kings and 2 Kings. These sources were apparently quite reliable, and certain details in the Biblical accounts of Assyria’s actions are therefore historically not too far off the mark. But over the centuries, prompted by new historical and theological concerns, Biblical authors repeatedly rewrote and reedited the accounts in question, so that, overall, their final versions cannot be considered accurate renderings of historical events.

This section seeks to offer a very basic outline of the Biblical passages devoted to the main episodes of Assyria’s interaction with Israel and Judah. For more detailed critical analyses, see Ackerman 2010: 129–42 and Sweeney 2010. It has been suggested that the type of historical writing found especially in 2 Kings may have been influenced, directly or indirectly, by Assyrian models such as the “Synchronistic History” (see Carr 2011: 312), but such dependence is difficult to prove.

Tiglath-pileser III’s military advances in the 730s and his interactions during this time with the Israelite kings Menahem, Pekah, and Hoshea as well as the Judahite king Ahaz are described in considerable detail in 2 Kings 15–17. The account states that Menahem, realizing Assyria’s superior power, paid tribute to the Assyrian king, whereas Pekah decided to join an anti-Assyrian coalition headed by Rezin of Damascus. When the Judahite ruler Ahaz refused to support the two allies, the so-called Syro-Ephraimite war broke out: according to the Biblical text, Pekah and Rezin attacked Jerusalem, but were defeated by Tiglath-pileser, who deposed and killed Pekah, transformed significant portions of Israel’s territory into Assyrian provinces, and placed a rump-state in the area around Samaria under the leadership of the new Israelite monarch Hoshea. All this is more or less in accordance with the information provided by Tiglath-pileser’s royal annals.

Hoshea did not remain a faithful Assyrian vassal for long. According to 2 Kings 17:1–6 and 18:9–12, he ceased to pay tribute to Tiglath-pileser’s successor Shalmaneser V and conspired with king So of Egypt (probably Osorkon IV, who resided in Tanis). Shalmaneser reacted immediately, besieged Samaria for three years, and eventually conquered it (in 722 BCE). While all of this is accurately recorded by the Biblical authors, only Assyrian

sources reveal that resistance fighters in Samaria continued the struggle for a little while, and that the final defeat of their city and the transformation of the region surrounding it into an Assyrian province were not achieved before the reign of Shalmaneser's successor Sargon II. In fact, Sargon's name is found in the Bible only once, in Isa. 20:1, in connection with the Assyrian conquest of Ashdod in 711 BCE. 2 Kings 17:6 and 17:24 note correctly, however, that large portions of Israel's population were deported by the Assyrians to the Khabur region and Media and replaced in their homeland by ethnic groups from other territories. Later legends about Israel's "Ten Lost Tribes" draw on these Biblical passages.

For most of the last third of the eighth century, Judah, much in contrast to Israel, had embraced a pro-Assyrian stance. According to 2 Kings 16:17–18, king Ahaz went so far as to make certain changes to cultic installations in the Jerusalem temple "because of the king of Assyria." Yet after the death of Sargon II – which may be reflected in Isa. 14 (see below, "Stories") – Ahaz's successor Hezekiah decided to stop paying tribute to his Assyrian overlords and to join an anti-Assyrian alliance of Western cities and states. In 701 BCE, the new Assyrian king Sennacherib conducted a campaign against the rebels in the Levant, in the course of which he destroyed numerous Judean cities, reduced Judah's territory, and forced Hezekiah to send a large tribute to Nineveh. Hezekiah, however, stayed in office as an Assyrian vassal king, and the Assyrians never conquered his capital Jerusalem.

No other episode in the history of Israel's and Judah's encounters with Assyria is more extensively treated in the Bible than the conflict between Sennacherib and Hezekiah, which is the main topic of 2 Kings 18:13–19:37, 2 Chron. 32:1–22, and Isa. 36:1–37:37 (see also Mic. 1:8–16). Since Sennacherib's 701 campaign is also described in some detail in Assyrian sources, and even in Herodotus, many scholars have used it as a test case to evaluate the reliability of the historical books of the Bible (see, most recently, Gallagher 1999; Grabbe 2003; and Kalimi and Richardson 2014, each with further literature). As it turns out, certain portions of the Biblical account seem to be quite accurate. 2 Kings 18:13–14, for example, specifies that Hezekiah had to pay Sennacherib thirty talents of gold, which corresponds exactly to the number provided in Sennacherib's own inscriptions (in contrast, the amount of silver mentioned in the same lines differs from that in the Assyrian texts). The reference in 2 Kings 18:17 to the Tartan, Rab-Saris, and Rab-šaḳê as leaders of the Assyrian army reflects a good knowledge of Assyrian military titles on the part of the Biblical author (Vanderhooft 2008: 86). On the other hand, there are passages that were clearly either substantially revised or newly added at some later point. N. Na'aman (2003) has convincingly shown how in 2 Kings 18–19, chronistic and narrative texts related to Sennacherib's campaign were combined by an earlier Biblical redactor and then updated by another one during the late years of the

Babylonian empire or the early Persian period to reflect the concerns of the Judeans exiled to Babylonia.

The most severe historical “distortion” in the Biblical account is the claim that Sennacherib suffered a massive defeat at the gates of Jerusalem, with “the angel of the Lord” allegedly striking down “one hundred eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians” (2 Kings 19:35). The Biblical authors invented this “happy ending” because they wished to present Hezekiah as a pious hero who was rewarded for his faithfulness with divine favor. In truth, Sennacherib and his army returned to Nineveh because the king had no need to expose Jerusalem to a long and costly siege. By turning Judah into a vassal state, he had reached the main political goal of his campaign against Hezekiah.

In 2 Kings 19:36–7 (and elsewhere), the Bible reports quite accurately that Sennacherib was murdered by a group of conspirators from among his own sons – who then fled to “Ararat” (i.e., Urartu) – and was succeeded by king Esarhaddon. This is one of the few cases where the Bible covers events in Assyria that were not immediately related to the situation in Israel and Judah. In a prophetic speech reportedly made by Isaiah (2 Kings 19:7), Sennacherib’s murder is attributed to Yahweh and presented as divine revenge for the king’s assault on the holy city of Jerusalem. Cogan (2009), pointing out that this brings to mind similar claims by Nabonidus with regard to Sennacherib’s destruction of Babylon, has cautiously suggested that the authors of Nabonidus’s inscriptions learnt of the motif of Sennacherib’s divine punishment from a Judean exile, but such a scenario is hard to prove. As pointed out below in the section on “Stories,” the episode of Esarhaddon’s rise to power may have left some traces in the story of Joseph.

The Bible’s goal to present Hezekiah, counterfactually, as a successful “freedom fighter” explains why it provides so little information on the political situation under his successor Manasseh. Otherwise, it would have become all too clear that Manasseh, as we know from Assyrian sources, was a faithful Assyrian vassal who had little agency. Another reason why the Bible has so little to say about the political events under Manasseh is that, except for Manasseh supplying auxiliary troops when Esarhaddon attacked Egypt, Judah enjoyed a prolonged period of peace during his reign – as Hegel pointed out (in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*), “the periods of happiness are the blank pages of history.”

After the short reign of Amon, Judah was ruled from 641 BCE onwards by Manasseh’s grandson Josiah. Assyria, under its new king Assurbanipal, had lost much of its influence in the Levant by now, which enabled Josiah to restore Judah’s independence and implement, allegedly in his 18th regnal year (2 Kings 22:3), a major religious reform. 2 Kings does not mention Assyria in this context – the only Biblical reference to Assurbanipal, called Osnappar, is found in a flashback in Ezra 4:10. But many scholars believe that Assyrian royal ideology, communicated through the Assyrian Vassal Treaties imposed

on Judah some time earlier, may have influenced Josiah's new religious politics (see below, "Political Ideology and Law").

The downfall of the Assyrian state in the years 614–609 BCE is only obliquely reflected in 2 Kings (23:29). The Biblical book of Nahum, however, deals with it at significant length, celebrating the destruction of Nineveh in 612 with utter relish, as does the conclusion of the book of Tobit (14:15) (for discussion, see Machinist 1997). The focus on Nineveh in these accounts is not surprising, since Nineveh, Assyria's seventh century BCE political capital, was by far the most important Assyrian city for the Biblical authors, who mention it seventeen times (see Dietrich 2001).

Even after its demise, the Assyrian empire continued to serve as a cipher for imperial hubris in newly written Biblical texts. The 2nd century BCE apocryphal book of Judith, for example, claims that Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king who destroyed the kingdom of Judah and brought the Judeans into exile, "ruled over the Assyrians in the great city of Nineveh" (Judith 1:1). Passages like this create a fictitious image of an Assyro-Babylonian super-power waging war against Biblical lands. A more positive view of Assyria seems to be behind the designation of the Persian ruler Darius I – who had facilitated the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem – as "king of Assyria" in Ezra 6:22.

The last example notwithstanding, the foregoing paragraphs demonstrate that Assyria's image in the Bible is largely that of an imperial aggressor. Its kings are portrayed as cruel and arrogant. With the exception of a note in 2 Kings 19:37 according to which Sennacherib was killed while "worshipping in the house of his god Nisroch" (possibly Nusku/Nasuh, the son of the moon-god, and not Ninurta, as usually claimed; see Frahm 2011: 274–5), there are no references to Assyrian kings relying on divine aid. Instead, the Assyrian rulers are said to ascribe their achievements in their hubris entirely to themselves: "by the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I have understanding" (Isa. 10:13).

At the same time, the Biblical authors present the Assyrian monarchs as acting involuntarily on behalf of the Biblical god. They are tools of Yahweh, who uses the Assyrian army to punish the cultic and social transgressions of the Israelites and Judahites. This is implicitly stated, to name just two examples, in 2 Kings 15:18–19 and 28–9, where references to the "sins" of Menahem and Pekah, respectively, are followed by notes on attacks on Israel by Tiglath-pileser III, and is pointed out explicitly in Isa. 10:5–6, where Yahweh famously declares: "Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger ... – against a godless nation (a reference to Israel) I send him and against the people of my wrath I command him, to take spoil ... and tread them down like the mire of the streets." In a similar vein, Hosea 9:1–3 chastises Israel for having "played the whore, departing from ... God," and announces that its people "shall not remain in the land of the Lord, but ... shall return to Egypt, and in Assyria

they shall eat unclean food.” The Assyrian exile of the Israelites is represented in this passage as a metaphorical return to Egypt, where the chosen people had once experienced a life of misery and servitude (Ackerman 2010: 138).

Assyria’s own ultimate fate is usually portrayed as equally grim in the prophetic books. Isa. 10:12, for example, claims that, eventually, “the Lord ... will punish the arrogant boasting of the king of Assyria and his haughty pride.” The detailed account of the destruction of Nineveh in the book of Nahum, presented as a prophecy but clearly written after the fact, has already been mentioned. Isa. 20:25, on the other hand, in an oracle concerning Egypt, states that a day will come when God will proclaim: “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage.”

Stories

The foregoing discussion has focused on explicit references to Assyria in Biblical historiography and prophecy. But Assyrian “motifs” have also left – more indirect – traces in a number of Biblical narratives and poetic sections. Tracking down such traces is, unfortunately, charged with significant methodological problems. It is not enough to hunt for isolated parallels – if one wants to establish an Assyrian background for a Biblical story, the parallels have to be numerous and/or specific, and a case needs to be made for a historical scenario behind the alleged borrowing (see the discussion in Henkelman 2006). Even in cases that seem to meet these requirements, absolute certainty is normally elusive, and there is often no consensus on whether Assyrian influence really played a role.

Despite the fact that the Assyrian king Sargon II is named only once in the Bible (see above, “History”), it has been suggested that events from his reign had an impact on two particularly prominent episodes in the Bible. C. Uehlinger (1990) has posited the existence of an original version of the famous Tower of Babel story in Gen. 11:1–9 that had nothing to do with Babylon but was a subtle critique of Sargon’s attempt to build from scratch a massive new capital, the city of Dur-Šarrukīn (Khorsabad). One of Uehlinger’s main leads is the expression *pā ištēn šušunu*, used in Sargon’s inscriptions to describe how the king made his workmen, who came from all of Western Asia, “of one mouth.” Uehlinger argues that this phrase inspired the depiction found in the Tower of Babel episode of the linguistic dynamics at the beginnings of history. Initially, “the whole earth had one language and the same words” before, later, the proverbial “confusion of tongues” ensued. Uehlinger considers the Biblical narrative a counter-story that reverses the unifying message of Sargon’s building accounts – a message that had been compromised when Sargon was killed in 705 BCE and Dur-Šarrukīn, after serving as residence of the Assyrian court for only a very short time, was

partly abandoned. This interpretation has not found universal approval, but several scholars have accepted and further developed it (see, e.g., van der Kooij 2012: 19–24).

As has been repeatedly observed (for some references, see Frahm 2011: 278), Sargon's violent death in 705 BCE on the battlefield in Tabal in Anatolia may have Biblical resonances as well, in the mocking dirge in Isaiah 14 that commemorates the downfall of an oppressive anonymous "king of Babel." The Isaiah text addresses this monarch with the words: "All the kings of the nations lie in glory, each in his own tomb; but you are cast out, away from your grave ... like a corpse trampled underfoot" (Isa. 14:18–19). Even though not everyone agrees (see especially Olyan 2006), it does not seem far-fetched to assume that this description was inspired by the fate of Sargon, whose body had not been recovered after he had been killed – and whose death initiated a period of religious-historical soul-searching in Assyria. The designation of the fallen ruler as "king of Babel" instead of "king of Assyria" may be the result of a later editorial adaptation made under the impression of the Babylonian exile. Isaiah's exclamation "how you (the dead king) are fallen from heaven, Bright one, Son of Dawn (Hebr. *hēlēl ben šāḥar*)" (Isa. 14:12), translated in the Vulgata as "quomodo cecidisti de caelo lucifer," was later interpreted by Origen and other Christian theologians as referring to the devil (see Frahm 2013: 111–12) – a strange "mnemohistorical" trajectory for a passage that may once have described in metaphorical terms the demise of a Late Assyrian monarch.

Another Assyrian king whose fate may have left indirect traces in a famous Biblical tale is Esarhaddon, who came to the throne after defeating his regicide brothers, as described both in his own inscriptions and the Bible (2 Kings 19:37). In Frahm 2009: 39–41, I have argued that the episode of Esarhaddon's rise to power shares a number of intriguing features with the story of Joseph (especially Genesis 37:1–11). First and foremost, both Esarhaddon and Joseph are younger sons who are, nonetheless, selected by their respective fathers, Sennacherib and Jacob, to play future roles of great consequence. Both are encouraged by a number of divine signs. The jealous elder brothers hate and seek to denounce them, but their fathers remain secretly attached to them. And both Esarhaddon and Joseph become eventually, each in his own way, rulers of Egypt. Whether these parallels suffice to establish that the "author" of the Joseph story really drew on the history of Esarhaddon will remain controversial, but the possibility should not be discounted, all the more so since Esarhaddon is also prominently featured in the Aramaic Ahiqar tale, which bears some similarities with the Joseph story as well (see Müller 1977–78).

In one case, it was not an Assyrian king but a queen-mother whose deeds – conveyed through legendary tradition – may have left traces in the Biblical record: it seems possible that the Biblical book of Jonah draws on the

Semiramis legend, which, in turn, goes back to stories about Sammu-ramat, the exceptionally influential late ninth century wife of Šamši-Adad V and mother of Adad-nirari III (see Weinfeld 1991; Frahm 2016). According to Greek tradition primarily known from the work of Ctesias – and probably deriving from Aramaic tales – Semiramis was the daughter of the fish-bodied goddess Derceto (Atargatis) of Ashkelon and a Syrian youth. Abandoned by her mother, Semiramis was fed by doves before being adopted by local shepherds. After marrying the Assyrian officer Onnes and then, later, the Assyrian king Ninus, she lived in Nineveh and became the most powerful woman of all times. Upon her death, she was turned into a dove. Four noticeable features connect her legend with the story of Jonah: Jonah's name means "dove"; he boards his ship in Jaffa, which is not far from Ashkelon (and belonged to the Ashkelonite state during the reign of Sennacherib); he spends time in the belly of a fish; and his journey ends in Nineveh. The story of Jonah almost seems like a Midrash on the Semiramis legend, even though the precise theological goals of this strange literary transformation remain elusive.

There are other possible links between Biblical stories and events from Assyrian history. Dalley 2007, for example, has argued that the book of Esther draws on political and religious conflicts that took place in Mesopotamia during the Late Assyrian period. Yet while it is true that the Esther story includes Mesopotamian motifs (the names "Esther" and "Mordecai" derive from "Ištar" and "Marduk," respectively), it remains uncertain whether its origins really date to the time of the Assyrian empire.

Political Ideology and Law

Other areas where scholars have sought to establish an Assyrian influence on the Bible are political ideology and law. Again, the degree of this influence has been much debated, without a full consensus in sight.

Machinist (1983) and more recently Aster (2007) and van der Kooij (2012) (all with additional literature) have argued that especially in the book of Isaiah, but also elsewhere in the Bible, there is a pronounced awareness of Assyrian royal ideology, an ideology most elaborately articulated in Assyrian royal inscriptions. Machinist has highlighted several motifs from these inscriptions that are taken up in Isaiah, from cutting the cedars of Lebanon to burning down enemy cities and being in awe of the glory of Assyrian power. While it remains questionable that Biblical authors came across such – fairly general – motifs by closely reading royal panegyrics in cuneiform (see Weissert 2011: 307–9), the idea that they became aware of them in more indirect ways – especially through personal encounters with representatives of the Assyrian crown, either at home or abroad, for example when delivering

tribute – is certainly plausible.

A passage that shows particular awareness on the part of the Biblical authors of the self-representation of Assyrian kings is Isa. 10:5–15, which pretends to quote the words of one of them (van der Kooij 2012: 13–18). Isaiah's anonymous Assyrian ruler claims to have “removed the boundaries of the peoples and plundered their treasures” (Isa. 10:13), a statement that is in line with actual Assyrian ideology.

Isaiah is critical of the Assyrian ambition to “gather all the earth” (Isa. 10:14), for world domination, in his view, belonged exclusively to the Biblical god. Isa. 6:3 states: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” From a modern historical perspective, however, it was quite possibly the experience of Assyrian domination that inspired “theologians” in Judah such as Isaiah to envision a god who was ruling the whole earth (Hom 2012).

The same kind of political-theological transfer – or “Umbuchung,” to use the economic term introduced by Assmann (2002: 49–52) to describe this phenomenon – seems to characterize the adoption and adaptation by Biblical authors of certain legal traditions related to Assyria. It must be admitted, though, that the assessment of parallels between the legal corpora of Mesopotamia and the Bible is again fraught with methodological difficulties (see Malul 1990) and that the three cases presented in the following are viewed quite differently in modern scholarship. The relevant literature is vast and can be discussed here only selectively.

Several scholars, most recently and systematically D. Wright (2009), have observed that there are conspicuous similarities between certain sections of the Hammurapi Law Code (CH), which was originally promulgated in the 18th century BCE, and the Biblical law collection known as the Covenant Code (Ex. 20:19–23:33). Particularly impressive are the parallels of a number of laws pertaining to a goring ox in §250–2 of the CH and the legal prescriptions in Ex. 21:28–32. There are, moreover, structural parallels in the overall arrangements of the laws in the two texts (Wright 2009: 9). Wright argues that the Covenant Code is a polemical rewriting of the CH, aimed at revealing that only God, and not a human king, could be a legitimate lawgiver (2009: 287–93). Since it is now acknowledged by most Biblical scholars that the Covenant Code precedes the so-called Deuteronomistic Code (Deut. 12–26), Wright dates the creation of the Covenant Code to the years between 740 and 640 BCE. Pointing out that the CH, despite its great age, was studied by Neo-Assyrian scribes in various Assyrian cities, Wright argues that the author of the Covenant Code had immediate access to written versions of it.

Even though Wright may occasionally over-emphasize the parallels between the CH and the Covenant Code (see the critique by Polak 2010), there are, undeniably, conspicuous similarities between the two texts. A Mesopotamian

background for parts of the Covenant Code is therefore likely, but whether the “borrowing” that apparently occurred was really as unmediated as assumed by Wright remains somewhat questionable (see the discussion in Wells 2015). A particularly vexing problem is the dearth of evidence for attempts on the part of the Assyrian elites to disseminate their cuneiform scholarly tradition, which included studying the CH, in the West (see Morrow 2005).

The problem of establishing a plausible channel of transmission also applies to suggestions that a number of legal provisions in the book of Deuteronomy are based on the so-called “Tablet A” of the Middle Assyrian Laws (MAL), which deals with marriage and family law. E. Otto (1999: 203–17 and *passim*) has shown that the two law collections share a number of similar legal propositions (e.g., MAL A §12–16 and Deut. 22:22–9) and has argued that the authors of the earliest version of the Deuteronomistic Code used MAL A as a model to weaken the emphasis the Covenant Code put on private initiative in criminal law. This is not entirely impossible – even though written in the late second millennium, the most important manuscript of the MAL was found in Ashur in a Neo-Assyrian context, and a duplicate was unearthed in Assurbanipal’s library at Nineveh. There is, hence, no doubt that the MAL continued to be studied in Late Assyrian times. One wonders, nonetheless, whether it is likely that an Israelite or Judahite would have had access to the text.

Our last case of an Assyrian “legal” text possibly influencing Biblical law is the most plausible one, since a credible historical scenario can be proposed for the presumed borrowing. Ever since their publication in 1958, scholars have been aware of a number of intriguing parallels between the so-called Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon (VTE), re-edited most recently in SAA 2 (no. 6), and portions of the book of Deuteronomy, especially in [chapters 13](#) and [28](#). The VTE tablets, now known from manuscripts found at Calah, Ashur, and Tell Tayinat on the Orontes, include a long list of loyalty oaths imposed by Esarhaddon in the spring of 672 BCE on his Assyrian subjects, his religious, military, and political officials, and various Assyrian vassals, with the goal of securing the succession of his son Assurbanipal to the Assyrian throne. Both the treaty clauses and the curses in the VTE have parallels in Deuteronomy (for recent discussions, see Steymans 1995 and Radner 2006; for a more skeptical view, Crouch 2014). Thus, VAT §10, with its stipulations concerning treachery coming from the mouth of various family members (brothers, sons, daughters) as well as “prophets, ecstasies, and inquirers of oracles,” is very similar to the provisions in Deut. 13:2–10, and the sequential cluster of curses in VTE §39–42 has pronounced correspondences in Deut. 28:26–35. But while the VTE requires loyalty to the Assyrian king, Deuteronomy stipulates that this loyalty is owed to God, a polemical “inversion” that establishes, as argued especially by Otto (1999), an entirely new form of religious allegiance.

Many scholars believe that the historical background for the Biblical adaptation of the VTE is sketched out in 2 Kings 22–3, where we find a report about the discovery, in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, of a “book of the law” stipulating that the official cult should be centered in Jerusalem and devoted to Yahweh alone. Students of the Hebrew Bible have argued for a long time that the law book in question was an early version of Deuteronomy, which promotes a very similar religious program. This chronological anchoring of a “proto-Deuteronomy” adds credibility to the idea that the book was partly modeled on the VTE, which were drafted a few decades before Josiah’s religious reform. The recent discovery of a new manuscript of the VTE in Tell Tayinat on the Orontes (Lauinger 2012) – where it was prominently displayed in a local temple – proves that at least some members of the political elites of the Levant were exposed to the text, making it more probable that a version of the VTE was also available in Jerusalem (Fales 2012). An interesting clause in the Tell Tayinat manuscript requires the local leaders “to guard the tablet like your god” (Lauinger 2012: 98–9, 112, §35). There is still no consensus on whether “proto-Deuteronomy” was primarily aimed at subverting Assyrian royal ideology, as argued by Otto, or rather at replacing the earlier Covenant Code (thus Levinson and Stackert 2012), but most scholars now agree that the VTE had at least some influence on the text.

More Immediate Assyrian Influences on Religion and Culture in Israel and Judah?

While there can be little doubt that Assyria’s imperial expansion in the eighth and seventh centuries BCE shaped central ideas articulated in the Hebrew Bible in indirect ways, the question of a more immediate Assyrian influence on Israelite and Judahite religion and culture remains debated. For a long time, scholars took for granted that Assyria had pursued a policy of religious coercion, imposing on defeated nations, among other things, the cult of Assur. Some forty years ago, however, M. Cogan put this idea into question, arguing that there was little evidence for any kind of religious “proselytizing” on the part of the Assyrians (Cogan 1974). H. Spieckerman (1982) sought to refute Cogan’s arguments and resurrect the concept of an Assyrian religious imperialism, but Cogan (1993) defended his thesis and held on to it. Recent studies, especially Holloway 2002, have sought to provide more nuanced assessments of the evidence, while S. Parpola, in a series of ambitious publications (see below in this section), has tried to demonstrate that Assyrian religion had an enormous impact on central ideas articulated in the Bible, as well as in Neo-Platonic and Kabbalistic texts.

Without being able to go into detail, I believe the available sources support the skeptical approach taken by Cogan and several other scholars (see Frahm 2011: 280–3). As pointed out above in the section on “Terminology,” the Bible never mentions the god Assur. One could be inclined to attribute this silence to an act of suppression, prompted by a desire on the part of the Biblical authors not to become entangled in what they may have perceived as the dangerous fascination of this god; but since there is almost no evidence for a full-fledged cult of Assur anywhere outside his home city, such a view is unlikely. That governors of newly conquered provinces were asked to send offerings to the Assur temple in Ashur (see Holloway 2002: 100–8) only confirms that the Assyrian state god was far away. To be sure, an emblem called the “weapon of Assur” (*kakku ša Aššur*), apparently some kind of military standard, was occasionally displayed in foreign cities, sometimes in local temples, but it was most likely used in the administration of loyalty oaths and not as the object of a regular cult (Holloway 2002: 160–77). Also, the description in 2 Kings 16 of certain modifications of Jerusalem’s cultic infrastructure during the reign of Ahaz does not mention any particularly “Assyrian” elements (Cogan 1974: 73–7).

Still, both E. Otto (1999: 69–88) and B. Levine (2005) maintain that the god Assur, and the centralization of his cult in the city of Ashur, provided a model for Israelite monotheism and the centralization of Yahweh’s cult in Jerusalem. This suggestion cannot be dismissed out of hand, but it seems preferable to me to assume that, rather than the Assyrian god, it was the Assyrian king and the monocratic nature of his imperial rule that served as a model for these highly consequential innovations. It is also questionable, in my view, that the Marduk theology of the Babylonian creation epic *Enūma eliš* inspired Judahite scribes of the Late Assyrian period to develop new ideas regarding the concept of Yahweh’s divine kingship, as recently argued by Flynn (2013). *Enūma eliš* may well have influenced a number of Biblical authors, but it seems more likely that this happened later, during the time of the Babylonian exile and its aftermath.

Over the past two decades, S. Parpola has made a number of far-reaching claims with regard to the impact that certain esoteric aspects of Assyrian religion, through channels that are usually not specified, allegedly had on the Bible and on Jewish, Christian, and Neo-Platonic thought (see especially Parpola 1993 and SAA 9: XIII–CVIII). In Parpola’s view, the Assyrian Assur theology inspired Biblical monotheism, the Assyrian king provided the model for the concept of the Messiah, the goddess Ištar was an early form of the Holy Spirit, divine constellations in Assyrian prophecies anticipated the idea of the Holy Trinity, and the Sefirotic Tree prominently featured in the Kabbalah of esoteric Judaism had its roots, quite literally, in Assyrian soil. Parpola’s reasoning is thought-provoking and informed by deep learning, but the author fails to produce concrete evidence from the Neo-Assyrian period

proving that the aforementioned ideas really played a major role in Assyrian religious thought. For this reason, most scholars have dismissed Parpola's claims (see, inter alia, Cooper 2000 and Frahm 2000), and only a few have defended them (e.g., Gruenwald 1997). To be sure, there are Jewish texts that were informed by esoteric traditions related to Mesopotamian scholarship and religion, for example, the Astronomical Book of Enoch, which draws on a cuneiform treatise, *Enūma Anu Enlil* XIV (see Drawnel 2007). But this recourse to Mesopotamian scholarly-esoteric concepts and ideas occurred long after the downfall of the Assyrian empire. During the Assyrian period, Assyrian intellectual and spiritual traditions probably had little direct influence on Israelite and Judahite religion

Conclusions

As recently argued by Bagg (2013: 305–8), the Neo-Assyrian state of the eighth and seventh centuries BCE was an “empire without mission,” apart from never-ending conquest. It sought to achieve maximum profits through a policy based on fairly minimal investments, both logistically and ideologically. Accordingly, no Assyrian king ever tried to impose the cult of Assyrian deities on conquered nations, including Israel and Judah. And yet, Assyria's imperial expansion left pronounced traces in the Hebrew Bible, a book whose literary origins go back to the Neo-Assyrian period.

Several of the western campaigns the Assyrian armies undertook during the second half of the eighth century are described in considerable detail in 2 Kings and elsewhere, and the downfall of the Assyrian empire is featured prominently in the book of Nahum. The Bible criticizes the hubris of the Assyrian conquerors and uses Assyria as a foil to highlight the specific identity of Israel and Judah. This is in marked contrast to the far more “cosmopolitan” Aramaic literature featuring Assyrian kings, for example, the Ahiqar story or Papyrus Amherst 63, which fully endorse the imperial spirit of the age (Sanders, forthcoming). But the Bible also describes the Assyrian kings as tools of Yahweh, who punishes Israel and Judah for their social and religious failings by sending against them the conquering Assyrian troops. Somewhat paradoxically, Yahweh himself acquires features of the Assyrian king in this process, a political-religious inversion that is particularly pronounced in the Biblical book of Deuteronomy. Some chapters of this book are modeled on Esarhaddon's “Vassal Treaties” but command that the loyalty originally owed to the Assyrian king be shown instead to God.

As forcefully argued by Otto (2002, esp. 167–94), this rewriting had, in some respects, a profoundly liberating effect, creating, for the first time in human history, a deep sense that human beings were not beholden to follow without fail the will of their political rulers but rather obey a divine law that takes into

account the needs of those who lack power. But Otto somewhat minimizes the fact that this theological remodeling provided God himself with some rather despotic qualities and generated, over time, hitherto unknown forms of religious intolerance that became even more pronounced when Christianity and Islam, with their more universal ambitions, adopted central tenets of ancient Judaism. This ambivalence of the role of God and his law in the monotheistic religions, emancipating on one hand and repressive on the other, is to some extent owed to Israel's and Judah's encounter with the Assyrian empire and one of the most important legacies of this state until today.

Abbreviations

SAA

= S. Parpola (ed.), *State Archives of Assyria*, 19 volumes published, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press 1987–.

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Further Reading

For general overviews of the impact of Assyrian history and culture on the books of the Bible, see Ackerman 2010, Frahm 2011, and Carr 2011: 304–38. The latter discusses extensively which parts of the Bible were most likely composed during the Neo-Assyrian period. The question of Assyria's alleged religious imperialism is explored by Cogan 1974 and 1993 and by Holloway 2002. Cogan and Tadmor 1988 provides a commentary on 2 Kings that deals at length with the passages related to Assyrian military campaigns. Otto 1999 and 2002 and Levinson and Stackert 2012 are among the many publications exploring the influence of Esarhaddon's Vassal Treaties on certain portions of the book of Deuteronomy. Machinist 1983 deals with reflections of Assyrian royal ideology in the book of Isaiah, and Machinist 1997 examines the Biblical references to Assyria's downfall from a comparative perspective.

CHAPTER 30

Assyria in Classical Sources

Robert Rollinger

There are in Assyria many other great cities; but the most famous and the strongest is Babylon, where the royal dwelling had been set after the destruction of Ninus.

(Herodotus 1.178.1, Godley, Loeb)

Assyria's Changing Image in Greek and Roman Texts

The first attestations of Assyria in classical sources appear only after the downfall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Since the authenticity of a fragment by Phocylides (fr. 4 Gentili–Prato), a poet living presumably during the sixth century BCE, remains doubtful (Korenjak and Rollinger 2001), the earliest classical source dealing with Assyria are the *Histories* of Herodotus, published in the 420 s BCE (Bichler and Rollinger, 2nd edition, 2011; see also Bichler 2000; Rollinger 2003b). Though we know that the Greeks were in contact with the Neo-Assyrian empire from at least the eighth century BCE onwards (see [Chapter 14](#)), only three hundred years later Assyria and Babylonia were, astonishingly, no longer clearly distinguished from each other in Greek texts. According to Herodotus, the Assyrian empire had two royal residences. The most ancient one was Ninus, which was located on the Tigris River (see Hdt. 1.193.2; 2.150.3). After its destruction, Babylon became the seat of Assyrian kingship, where Assyrian kings were allegedly engaged in building activities that focused on city walls and sanctuaries (Hdt. 1.184). Concerning Assyria's history, Herodotus's account remains very sketchy. Yet, he developed a far-reaching concept that would become a definitive part of all world histories, at least until the 18th century CE (Rollinger 2003a; Wiesehöfer 2003, 2005). According to this concept, world history is structured by a succession of empires; Assyria is the first of these, followed by the Median and Persian empires. The Assyrian empire is characterized by its longevity: it ruled over Western Asia for 520 years (1.95.2; see Bichler 2000: 136). But Herodotus has only very little information about the history of these five centuries. Aside from Ninus, the son of Belus, who remains a mythic figure, only two Assyrian kings are mentioned. The first, Sardanapallus, is mentioned in the context of a legend

about his great wealth, which he kept in an underground treasury (Hdt. 2.150.3). Chronologically, he may have been regarded as one of the early kings, since he is introduced as son of Ninus (see Zawadzki 1990b). The second, King Sennacherib, attacked Egypt “with a great host of Arabians and Assyrians” (Hdt. 2.141) but was not successful because, at Pelusium, a multitude of field mice devoured the Assyrian army’s quivers and bows and Sennacherib had to retreat. The attacks of the Medes on the Assyrian capital Ninus, another episode in the *Histories*, is not associated with any specific Assyrian king (see Rollinger 2010b, 2011a). Two assaults, the first by king Phraortes and the second by Cyaxares, fail (Hdt. 1.102; 1.103). Eventually, Cyaxares takes the city and brings “all Assyria except the province of Babylon” under his rule (1.106.2). Herodotus’s announcement that he would provide more information about this event, as well as about Assyrian history in general, in his “*Assyrioi Logoi*” (Hdt. 1.184) remains lamentably unredeemed (Zawadzki 1990a).

As we have seen, only with Herodotus’s *Histories* does Assyria gain momentum in classical tradition. Herodotus created a model that would be the basis for all treatises on the subject to come. Compared to the evidence of the Hebrew Bible, it is astounding that so many powerful Neo-Assyrian kings do not figure in this tradition. Also surprising is that, with one possible exception,¹ the city of Ashur is not mentioned, which is also true of the Hebrew Bible (Frahm 2003a: 19, Frahm 2011: 271–2).

Besides Herodotus’s *Histories*, one other classical work shaped the Greek tradition regarding Assyria. The “History of Persia,” written by Ctesias of Cnidus, comprises twenty-three books and was published after 392 BCE. It ends with a catalogue of kings running from Ninus to Artaxerxes II. The work has survived only in fragments (modern editions are Lenfant 2004; Stronk 2010; Llewellyn-Jones and Robson 2010; see generally Wiesehöfer, Rollinger, and Lanfranchi 2011). Assyrian history is discussed in the first three books, where we are informed that world history started with the first Assyrian king: “in ancient times, then, Asia was ruled by native kings, of whom is preserved no memory either of a notable deed or of a personal name. The first to be transmitted to history and memory for us as somebody who achieved great deeds is Ninus, king of the Assyrians” (F. 1b (i.4), Stronk 2010: 203). He is described as a warrior king who conquered lands all over Asia, between the Tanais and Nile Rivers, during a period of seventeen years. Only Bactria and India remained independent. Thus Ninus’s empire already mirrored the world empire of Ctesias’s own time, the Persian empire (Boncquet 1990). In Assyria proper, Ninus founded a new city from scratch, and “not only would it be the largest of any existing in the whole inhabited world, but likewise no one of his successors, if he were to put himself to such a task, should find it easy to surpass him” (F. 1b (iii.1), Stronk 2010: 205). Though the setting is a legendary one, the metaphor of surpassing any

successor and predecessor is a characteristic feature of Neo-Assyrian royal ideology (Rollinger 2008a). Since Ninus ruled the first world empire, his city is the first true metropolis:

He himself, however, after he had gathered men from everywhere and all necessary materials by the river Euphrates, founded a city, which was well fortified with walls, giving it the form of a rectangle. The longer sides of the city were each one hundred and fifty stadia in length, the shorter ones ninety. Since the total circumference of the city comprised four hundred and eighty stadia, he was not disappointed in his hope: no one would later found such a city, both with respect to the length of its circuit and to the magnificence of its walls. After all, the wall had a height of one hundred feet and its width was sufficient for three chariots to drive upon side by side. The total of all towers was one thousand five hundred, and their height was two hundred feet. In it, Ninus settled the most powerful of the Assyrians and those who wished to come from the other peoples. He named the city after himself, Ninus, and added to the territory of its colonists a large part of the neighboring countryside.

(F. 1b (iii.2–4), Stronk 2010: 205–7)

Ctesias is clearly playing with Herodotus's description of Babylon (Bichler 2011). For this reason, he even located Ninus on the Euphrates River. This is also true for his portrait of Semiramis, who in Herodotus's *Histories* is said to be a Babylonian queen. The legend of Semiramis as an Assyrian queen was shaped by Ctesias and became part of the classical tradition (Rollinger 2011b). Semiramis was married to Ninus, with whom she had one son, who was named Ninyas. She founded Babylon, conquered Egypt, Libya, and most of Ethiopia, and ruled over Asia for forty-two years. Only India could resist her advances. She became famous for her massive waste of lovers, whom she used to kill after a certain time. But aside from this misbehavior, her reign remained flawless. It is only with her son Ninyas that things changed substantially. Despotism began to characterize Assyrian rule and the king did not leave his palace anymore:

The fact that he was seen by no one outside the palace made everyone ignorant of the luxury of his manner of life. Because of their fear of him, as of an unseen god, nobody dared to show disrespect to him even in word. So by appointing generals, satraps, financial officers, and judges for each people and arranging all other matters as he felt to be to his advantage, he remained for his lifetime in Nineveh.

(F. 1b (xxi.7), Stronk 2010: 235)

According to Ctesias, all succeeding Assyrian kings would have followed this model. With two exceptions, these kings, thirty generations in which the son always followed his father on the throne, are not given names. Regarding the two kings who are named, Teutamus, the twentieth king after Ninyas, is said

to have sent Assyrian troops to his vassal, King Priam of Troy. More important was the last king, Sardanapallus, who is characterized as representing the height of decadence and effeminacy. Ctesias claims that he was defeated by a coalition under the Median Arbaces and the Babylonian Belesys, who put Ninus under siege and finally conquered the city (Rollinger 2010b, 2011b). Sardanapallus committed suicide, setting himself on fire along with his treasures and entourage. Ninus was completely destroyed and the Assyrian empire came to an end. The length of time of this empire was measured by Ctesias to be about 1300 years (see Rollinger 2011a, 328–9). This is more than the double of what Herodotus claims.

Ctesias created an account of Assyrian history that had a great impact on later tradition. A substantial part of it was transmitted in an excerpt by the Greek historian Diodorus, who became very influential when his work was translated into Latin in the 14th century CE. Assyria, according to Ctesias, was not only the first world empire ruling all over Asia but was also connected with allegedly specific forms of “Asian” kingship, i.e. despotism, the seclusion of the ruler in his palace-town, overwhelming luxury, revolts, and intrigues. Ctesias established an image of the Assyrian empire and its court that was informed by “orientalism” *avant la lettre* (Briant 1989) and that had little to do with historical reality (Rollinger 2010b, 68 with n. 31).

In antiquity, Ctesias’s work triggered a kind of “counter-history,” but it was one that did not gain momentum in classical tradition. The work in question is the *Babyloniaca* of the Babylonian priest Berossus, published during the time of the Seleucid king Antiochus I (281–261 BCE). The fact that Berossus wrote his treatise in Greek shows that he was focusing on a “Western” readership. Yet, his work seems not to have been consulted very often and it only survived in some fragments (all fragments are now published online by Brill’s New Jacoby; for Berossus in general, see Kuhrt 1987 and Haubold et al. 2012). In contrast to Herodotus and Ctesias, Berossus’s conception of world history was not structured as a succession of world empires. Rather, he presented the history of Asia as a sequence of dynasties. Moreover, Assyria lost its “canonical” position as the first world empire. It was replaced by an age-old Babylonia. In his account of postdiluvial history, Berossus notes the rule of Semiramis over Assyria (FGrHist 680 F *5 (25)) and claims that, thereafter, forty-five kings ruled for 526 years. Whether these kings are regarded as Assyrian remains unclear. After this, Berossus adduces a Chaldean king, Phulos (Pulu, another name of Tiglath-pileser III), who is succeeded by Senecherib (Sennacherib), king of the Assyrians. Senecherib waged war against Asia and Egypt and conquered Babylonia. In the surviving fragments, only his campaign against Cilicia is dealt with in more detail (Dalley 1999; Lanfranchi 2000: 23–31). Senecherib introduced his son Asordan (Aššur-nadin-šumi) as king in Babylonia. After reigning for eighteen years, Senecherib was assassinated. He was followed by his son, who ruled

for eight years, and by a certain Sammuges/Samoges (Šamaš-šumu-ukin), who ruled for twenty-one years. The latter was succeeded by his brother, Sardanapallus. Yet, he is not the last Assyrian king but rather Sarakos (Sîn-šarru-iškun) is, a man who is qualified as king of the Chaldeans. Sarakos's general, Nabopolassar, conspired with the satrap of Media, Astyages. Together they conquered Ninus, where Sarakos burned himself to death in his palace (for details see Rollinger 2011a: 331 f.). It looks as if Berossus was only interested in Assyria's history when it came into contact with Babylonian history. At any rate, Babylonia proper was his central focus and the Assyrian capital Ninus was only worth mentioning when it was captured by the Babylonian-Median coalition.

As already stressed above, it was Ctesias's view, more than any other, that shaped the later tradition. It was not only picked up by conventional historiography but was also integrated into new historiographical genres. One of these were chronicles that originated in Hellenistic times and that aimed at recording the history of the world from its beginning until recent times, structuring the events in a chronological order. As far as we know from the surviving fragments of these texts, one of their primary concerns was to separate "myth" from "history," thus developing a kind of scientific approach (see Geus 2002). History traditionally began with the Trojan War or the first Olympic Games. In the beginning, the *chronographiai* shared a primarily Greek perspective, but after some time they started to broaden their view and inserted the whole history of mankind into one great chronological system. As a consequence of this, scholars increasingly drew upon works that opened up spaces and eras beyond Greek history and the traditional chronological framework. In this context, Ctesias's work became a major source. One of the first authors to draw on Ctesias for this purpose was Castor of Rhodes (FGrHist 2B 250), who wrote a world chronicle that extended the historical horizon far beyond the Trojan War.

It is no surprise that it became standard to open studies of world history with Assyria and its king Ninus (Adler 1989: 17 f.). Traces of this chronographic conceptualization of world history can be found far beyond Antiquity, as exhibited by authors like Varro, Cephalaion, Julius Africanus, Eusebius, Orosius, the Excerpta Barbari, and Syncellus (Schwartz 1885: 6–7; Adler 1989: 17; Adler and Tuffin 2002: 91; Wallraff 2007: 130–1). When reading the works and fragments of these authors, one can see a fairly uniform conception of Assyrian history. They all begin with Ninus and conclude with Sardanapallus, counting between thirty-six and forty kings in total (for details see Rollinger 2011a: 323 f.). Only a few works have Ninus listed as the second king, starting Assyrian history instead with Belus, or even adducing a certain Ninus II as the last king. The Trojan War and King Teutamus, the twenty-sixth or twenty-seventh Assyrian ruler, provide an important chronological synchronism. Thus, two thirds of Assyrian history were

considered to reach beyond this chronographic cornerstone of Greek history. There is only one major disagreement between the various authors, concerning the total amount of years of Assyrian history. The calculations fluctuate between 1240 and 1541 years.

The aforementioned chronographic works deviated from Ctesias's conception in one central aspect: they did not consider world history as being structured by a succession of empires. But even in this respect Ctesias had his epigones. In the second half of the fourth century BCE, his model of three succeeding world empires – Assyria, Media, Persia – was picked up by Aristoxenus of Tarent and expanded to a four empire scheme: Syria (i.e. Assyria²), Media, Lydia, and Persia (fr. III 1 20, lines 23–5: Kaiser 2010: 58; see Zecchini 1988). And, in the first century BCE, Rome was introduced as the fifth and latest empire (Wiesehöfer 2005).

A prominent example of this long-lasting conception are the *Historicae Philippicae* of Pompeius Trogus. This historiographic work dates from the first century CE. It only survives as an abbreviated third-century CE excerpt from Justin (Bertelli 1983; English translation: Yardley 1994; for references see Rollinger 2011a: 316–18). Trogus's history of mankind begins with the Assyrians, who are succeeded by the Medes, the Persians, the Macedonians and, eventually, the Romans.

According to Trogus, Ninus and Semiramis were the first rulers of an empire that comprised all of Asia. The empire's expansive phase comes to an end with Semiramis's son Ninyas, and an era of decadence begins. The king remains in his palace, surrounded by his concubines, and becomes inaccessible. Even though claiming that the Assyrian empire lasted for 1300 years, Trogus does not mention any kings between Ninyas and Sardanapallus. According to his account, there was no change anymore: "history" had stopped. The Assyrian empire had become a symbol for stagnation and despotic power. When Sardanapallus came to power, he behaved like a woman and proved too inept to counter the revolt of Arbactus, the governor of Media. In the end, he committed suicide on the pyre, taking all of his treasures with him.

One of the most influential authors who drew on the same traditions as Trogus was Orosius, though there is one seminal difference between them: Orosius offers a Christian view on the history of mankind, also taking into consideration Biblical sources (Goetz 1980; Kaletsch 1993; Bellen 1998; English translation: Raymond 1936). In this regard, he followed the example of the Christian chronographer Iulius Africanus (around 200 CE).

Orosius's *Historiae adversum paganos*, written between 416 and 418 CE, would shape the Western view on world history considerably for the next centuries. Assyria remains the first empire in world history, but it is integrated into a Biblical-Christian framework – for Orosius history can only be

understood as salvation history. Ninus becomes a contemporary of Abraham and both are said to have lived 3184 years after Adam (1.1.5), and 2015 years before the birth of Jesus Christ (1.1.6). Orosius also associates Ninus chronologically with Roman history by dating him to 1300 years before the foundation of the city of Rome (1.4.1). Ninus's reign is presented along traditional lines – only the claim that he defeated Zoroaster, king of the Bactrians (1.4.3), is entirely new. For Semiramis, Orosius draws a picture imbued with Christian morals: sexual libertinage and incest become substantial components of the queen's life (1.4.7f). Similarly to Trogus's work, the only Assyrian rulers Orosius explicitly refers to are Ninus, Semiramis, and Sardanapallus. Apart from these, only one king is mentioned by name: Baleus, who is said to have reigned when Joseph was in Egypt, 1008 years before the foundation of the city of Rome (1.8.1 and 10). All together, Orosius counts 1160 years of Assyrian domination with “about 50 kings” (Rollinger 2011a: 313). Though Orosius keeps silent about most of the Assyrian kings, he does not seem to consider Assyrian history a period of deadlock, since wars are reported to have been an ongoing feature of it throughout the centuries (1.12.2). This only changes with Sardanapallus, “a man more corrupt than a woman” (1.19.1). Here we encounter the already well-known conception of an effeminate king, staying in his palace with his concubines until the Median governor Arbatus-Arbaces takes over his throne and kingship (1.19.1). Later in his work, Orosius seems to refer to a different tradition when he mentions Ninus's father Belus, who is said to have been the first ruler of the Assyrian empire (7.2.13).

As important as Orosius was for future views of world history in the West, in the east it was the first Byzantine world chronicle by John Malalas that influenced the historical perspective of the following generations. Malalas's chronicle encompassed eighteen books, starting with the creation of the world and ending in 563 CE (Thurn 2000: 1*–4*, Thurn and Meier 2009: 1–27; English translation: Jeffreys et. al. 1986). Like Orosius's, Malalas's chronicle is characterized by a Christian worldview. But unlike Orosius and Trogus, Malalas also integrates Greek myths into his work, which he interprets in a euhemeristic manner. Thus, history does not start with Assyria but rather with succeeding generations of giants. One of these giants was Nimrod, who founded Babylon (12 [I.7]).³ Yet, with Kronos, the first proper ruler, Malalas again refers to Assyria, since Kronos is also characterized as the first king of the Assyrians (12 [I.8]). His wife is Semiramis-Rhea. The couple has three children: two sons, Picus-Zeus and Ninus, and one daughter, Hera. After Kronos conquers the West, Picus-Zeus follows his father on the throne. Yet, from this time onwards, kingship seems to have been divided between two lines since Picus's son Belus becomes king of Assyria. He is succeeded by Ninus, who marries his mother, Semiramis-Rhea. The latter founds Ninus, the “city of the Assyrians” (15 [I.11]).

A characteristic feature of his work is that Malalas does not really distinguish between Assyrians and Persians. Thus, even Zoroaster becomes a member of Ninus's family. After Ninus, the warrior Thouras-Ares, a nephew of Semiramis, becomes king, and after him Lames, and after Lames Sardanapallus the Great. Though Sardanapallus is defeated by Perseus, the Assyrian empire continues to last until the time of Alexander the Great, with local kings newly in charge. One of them is Senakherim, whose rule is described in detail following the Biblical tradition of the Assyrian king's siege of Jerusalem (144–9 [V.70–2]). After his assassination, his son Nachordan becomes king. The next "Assyrian" kings that are mentioned are Nabukhodonosor (150 [VI.1]) and his son Baltasar. Only with Alexander the Great does the empire of the Assyro-Persians crumble (Rollinger 2012b: 321). A succession of world empires does not play any role in Malalas's chronicle.

Assyrian Rulers in Classical Sources

As we have seen above, Assyria had a firm place within classical tradition, at least from Herodotus onwards. It was defined as an empire with one capital, Ninus. Regarding its history, legends were circulating about the very first rulers and the last king. About the period in between, however, classical tradition had almost nothing to say, giving a list of anonymous kings at best, even though the Assyrian empire was held to have been the longest lasting of all world empires. The author primarily responsible for this picture was Ctesias, as his treatise had, according to Walter Burkert, "undeserved success" ("unverdienter Erfolg"). Burkert considered Ctesias's work a "scandal," since "practically nothing is right" ("Es stimmt so gut wie nichts"; Burkert 2009: 504). This is true but it is not the point. It is evident that reports and stories about Assyria in classical tradition must be viewed as a discourse embedded within a tradition created for a Greek and Latin speaking audience. It is a discourse from an outside perspective that has little to do with "history" as we understand it today. Yet, classical tradition at least kept alive the knowledge that Assyria played a major part in world history and that the establishment of the Assyrian empire was a seminal achievement.

There are a few historical "facts" regarding Assyria that the classical authors did get right. One of them is the notion of an Assyrian capital called Ninus, as the Greek and Roman authors put it, a name obviously derived from Assyrian "Ninua" (Nineveh). Whether this Ninus is really a representation of Nineveh, however, or just an amalgam of several Assyrian residential cities, including Ashur and Kalhu, is another question. Apparently, the name of Assyria's first king, the fictitious Ninus, was simply derived from the city's name. Concerning historical events linked to the city of Ninus, there is only one that was faithfully preserved by classical tradition: Ninus was conquered by the

Medes (and Babylonians), though the way this was achieved, again, was colored by fiction.

The importance of storytelling also becomes evident if we look at the rulers of the Assyrian empire. There are only four for whom we receive some kind of information. Two of them, Ninus and his son Ninyas, are apparently fictitious figures. Most of the extant stories, not only told within accounts of Assyrian history but also independently, concern the two others, Semiramis and Sardanapallus. Modern scholarship has made many efforts to “historicize” these rulers to a certain extent by connecting their names with two historical figures, Sammu-ramat and Assurbanipal. But even if one agrees that there is an etymological connection, this does not automatically mean that Semiramis and Sardanapallus are “historical” in a strict sense. They are, again, products of classical tradition and part of a specific discourse. By studying this tradition, we can learn much about this discourse but close to nothing about Assyrian history. Both Semiramis and Sardanapallus are presented as typical examples of Asian kingship and both are connected paradigmatically with specific events, namely the beginning and the end of an empire. Both are dazzling figures characterized not solely in a negative manner. Excessive sexuality plays a major role in both cases, but the two rulers are also praised for their astonishing efforts and achievements.

Semiramis, although an Assyrian queen, has special ties to the city of Babylon and is presented as an archetypal “builder”: with the first list of world wonders, probably originating in Hellenistic times, she became famous as the creator of the walls of Babylon. The Hanging Gardens, in contrast, were only ascribed to her in the early modern age; attempts to locate these gardens in Nineveh (Dalley 2013) are, hence, problematic (Bichler and Rollinger 2005; Rollinger 2008b, 2010a).

Sardanapallus is also a prominent figure in classical tradition. One can observe the development of his legend from its first attestation in the fifth century BCE all throughout Antiquity. Whereas Herodotus simply noted the king’s wealth, Aristophanes seems to have been the first to ascribe to him a somewhat peacockish behavior (Birds 1021). As we have seen, Ctesias portrayed the king as an effeminate ruler addicted to self-indulgence. It seems that the fourth century BCE was a crucial period concerning the formation of essential parts of the Sardanapallus legend. It was from this time onwards that stories began to circulate that quoted an alleged epitaph of Sardanapallus and described his tomb, which was localized either in Ninus or, astonishingly, in Cilicia. A comprehensive survey of this tradition is given by Athenaeus in his *Deipnosophists* (around 200 CE). The entire chapter XII 528e–530c is devoted to Sardanapallus, quoting many sources. One of them is Ctesias’s *Persian History* (F.1n, F.1pα, F.1q; see Stronk 2010: 258–61, 266–7), where, inter alia, the Assyrian king is described as being “bejeweled like a woman, combing purple wool in the company of his concubines and sitting among

them with knees uplifted, his eyebrows blackened, wearing a woman's dress and having his beard shaved close and his face rubbed with pumice (he was even whiter than milk, and his eyelids were painted)" (Gulick, Loeb). Then some other fragments are adduced, commenting on the tomb of Sardanapallus and its epitaph (XII 529d–530c):

Hence Sardanapallus, he who was the most prosperous man in the world, he who prized enjoyment throughout his whole life, shows also in death, by his attitude on his tomb as he snaps his fingers, that human affairs are worth nothing but mockery, not being worth the snap of a finger which he is represented as making twice in the choral procession ... At any rate it is plain that Sardanapallus was not wholly inactive, as is proved by the fact that on his tomb is the inscription: "Sardanapallus the son of Anacyndaraxes built Anchialê and Tarsus in a single day, yet now he is dead." Amyntas says in the third book of his *Stages* that in Nineveh is a high mound which Cyrus demolished in raising counter-walls against the city during the siege; and that this mound is said to be the work of Sardanapallus, who had been king in Nineveh; surmounting it was a stone column, on which was an inscription in Chaldean letters, which Choerilus translated and put into verse; it is this: "I became king, and whilst I looked upon the sun's light I drank, I ate, I loved, for that I knew the time to be short which mortals live, and moreover hath many changes and mishaps, and others will have joy of the goods I leave behind. Wherefore I have let no day go by whilst I pursued this my way." Cleitarchus, however, in the fourth book of his *History of Alexander* says that Sardanapallus died of old age after he was deposed from the throne in Syria. Aristobulus says: "In Anchialê, which Sardanapallus built, Alexander pitched his camp when he was marching inland against the Persians. And not far distant was the tomb of Sardanapallus, on which stood a stone figure with the fingers of the right hand brought closely together, as if snapping them. On it was inscribed, in Assyrian letters: 'Sardanapallus, son of Anacyndaraxes, built Anchialê and Tarsus in a single day. Eat, drink, and play; for other things are not worth *that*' – meaning, he seems to say, the snap of a finger."

(Gulick, Loeb)

Recently, it has been demonstrated that the triad "eat, drink, play" (with its hetero- and homosexual connotations; Burkert 2009: 50–5) is part of a Greek discourse about the correct conduct of life that started at the turn from the fifth to the fourth century BCE (Bernhardt 2009). In this discourse, the idea of a life of enjoyment and pleasure was opposed to the conception of temperance and self-control. Greek and Latin epitaphs, similar to that of Sardanapallus, exhibit the popularity of a Sardanapallus-like lifestyle within classical civilization. Thus, Sardanapallus's behavior does not have an "oriental" backbone (as supposed by Burkert 2009: 511–12) but rather is part of a discussion within the classical world disguised in an oriental cloak (Bernhardt

2009: 16–24; but cf. Frahm 2003b: 44* for a reference to “eating, drinking, and merrymaking” in one of Assurbanipal’s inscriptions).

As Athenaeus and many other classical sources exhibit, the figure of Sardanapallus could be used in various ways (see the survey of the sources by Weißbach 1920; Bernhardt 2009; Burkert 2009; cf. also Frahm 2003b). In a proverbial manner, Juvenal refers to the feathered cushions of Sardanapallus (*pluma Sardanapali*: Sat. X 362); Polybius blames the Bithynian king Prusias II by comparing him to Sardanapallus; Cassius Dio exploits the image of the Assyrian ruler in order to criticize the emperor Elagabalus; and Augustine condemns Sardanapallus for his hedonism (Bernhardt 2003: 240–1, Bernhardt 2009, 2–3). The plurality of the tradition is striking. There was no consensus about where and how the Assyrian ruler died, although his death on a pyre in the city of Ninus became the most popular story. It is not entirely clear why his tomb was located in Cilicia, but it seems very probable that the description of the statue on the monument that is said to have snapped with its fingers was modeled on Neo-Assyrian reliefs, in which Assyrian rulers were depicted with an extending and pointing finger (*ubāna tarāšu* in Akkadian) as a gesture of reference to the gods (Lanfranchi 2003: 83). Due to this gesture, a Neo-Assyrian monument is much more likely to be the archetype for this statue (Lanfranchi 2003) than a Neo-Hittite one (Burkert 2009: 509). From the inscriptions of Sennacherib, we learn that he erected an inscribed monument in Cilicia (Luckenbill 1924, 61–2). It may be that the popularity of the story of Sardanapallus’s alleged tomb in Cilicia prompted Berossus to correct this tradition by referring to Sennacherib’s campaign in that very region (Lanfranchi 2003: 86). But, clearly, Berossus was not very successful in this respect.

Not all classical authors, however, blamed Sardanapallus for his dissipation and effeminacy. The king’s behavior could also be taken as an excellent example of *savoir-vivre*. In this spirit, the owner of the Roman villa of Cato Uticensis at Frascati had a statue of Dionysus, a marble copy of a Greek bronze statue of the fourth century BCE, inscribed with the name of Sardanapallus, thus identifying the god and the king (Megow 1997; Bernhardt 2009: 21–2 with plate 4). The statue originates from Claudian times (mid-first century CE) and is housed in the Vatican (Sala della Biga, Inv. 2363). Already in Hellenistic times, *truphe*, i.e. daintiness or delicacy, a main characteristics of “Orientals” in general and of Sardanapallus specifically, could be reinterpreted in a positive manner, demonstrating abundance and effulgence, and connected to the cult of Dionysus (Bernhardt 2003: 246).

There is a further aspect of the Sardanapallus legend that should be noted: classical tradition was also aware that the Assyrian king was able to fight when it was necessary and that he knew to die in a heroic manner. This element of the tradition was very much the focus in the Romantic era of the nineteenth century CE, when Lord Byron wrote his play “Sardanapalus”

(1821) and Eugène Delacroix painted his “La mort de Sardanapale” (1827). Through these lenses, the Assyrian king, rather than being an archetypal tyrant, seemed to live up to certain Epicurean ideals: he did not shed the blood of his people, did not oppress them with taxes, and did not touch their private lives (Bernhardt 2009: 5–11; see also Frahm 2003b).

But this is another story. In classical tradition, Sardanapallus generally became the prototype of an ethically degenerate monarch whose downfall was tied to that of the city of Ninus. The image of the beardless Sardanapallus had nothing to do with any Assyrian king, just as the city of Ninus is much more an archetypal representation of an empire’s capital than a reflection of the historical city of Nineveh. Aside from Ninus, there were only two other cities in classical tradition whose fall created such a literary reverberation: Troy and Sybaris (Bernhardt 2009: 22). Thus the city and its last ruler were rather symbols in a classical discourse than reflections of any kind of historical reality. They served as examples in the contemplation of downfall and demise, fugacity and transience, and the everlasting question how to live one’s life. All of this was encapsulated in Sardanapallus’s pseudo-epitaph, which the Stoic Chrysippus quoted the following way (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* VIII 336a, Glick, Loeb):⁴

Keep in mind that you are mortal, and make yourself happy
By enjoying feasts; nothing is any use to you once you are dead.
For I am dust, even though I was king of great Ninus.

What is mine is what I ate, and the malicious fun I had, and the pleasure
I got in bed, whereas my enormous, well-known wealth has perished.
This is wise advice for living, and I will never
Forget it; let anyone who wishes acquire endless gold.

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Further Reading

So far there is no monographic treatment of the topic available, but the most important sources are introduced and discussed by Rollinger 2011a. On Semiramis, see in detail Rollinger 2010a. On the Hanging Garden(s) of Babylon and the problem of their localization, see Dalley 2013, Rollinger and Bichler 2005, and now Bagge 2014. The Western concept of *translatio imperii* is discussed with further literature by Wiesehöfer 2005.

Notes

¹ Polybius 5,51,2, where a city called Libba is mentioned, which might be

Libbi-āli, i.e. Ashur (positive: Lipiński 2000: 256–57; negative: Hauser 1995: 232 n. 50).

- 2 Syria is an abbreviated form of Assyria: see Rollinger 2006.
- 3 The foundation of Babylon by giants is already attested in the works of some of the Early Church Fathers. The same applies to the vibrant tradition of Babylon as capital of the Assyrians; cf. Marksches 2011: 289–91.
- 4 J. v. Arnim, *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*, Volume III, 1905, F 11.

CHAPTER 31

The Archaeological Exploration of Assyria

Mogens Trolle Larsen

The Assyrian empire collapsed in 612 BCE. Its large cities were besieged, captured, and put to the torch, and the population of the Assyrian heartland dispersed, leaving cities and towns empty.¹ Assyria's huge palaces were destroyed and pillaged by Medes and Babylonians, the very people who had previously been subjugated by the Assyrian armies. Not surprisingly, the sons and grandsons of the men who had earlier been conquered, tortured, and killed by the Assyrian kings took their revenge; they went through the halls and galleries, smashing the heads of the Assyrian heroes depicted in their grand moments of victory on the majestic reliefs lining the walls.

The great Assyrian cities were abandoned, with only a few squatters returning, settling in the shadow of the ruins. Assyria was no more. When the Greek philosopher and general Xenophon led his mercenary army of 10,000 back from Babylonia some 200 years later, he did not know the ancient names of the ruined cities he passed, and he thought they had been built by the Medes, the very people who had destroyed them. The knowledge of the Assyrian empire lived on primarily in the gruesome accounts of the Hebrew Bible, where no kind word about this formidable enemy can be found. Ancient Assyria became a mythical land, dimly remembered in the Bible and in a few classical writers.

But the local population of northern Iraq never forgot the location of the great capital of the Assyrian empire, Nineveh or Nuniya (just as the site of ancient Babylon continued to be remembered). Nineveh was now a large field of ruins with two mounds and walls stretching for kilometers as grass-covered hills lying opposite the modern city of Mosul across the river Tigris. One of the mounds was crowned by the mosque thought to contain the grave of the prophet Jonah, who is said in the Hebrew Bible to have been sent to warn the inhabitants of Nineveh against the consequences of their wickedness.

Botta, Layard, and the Rediscovery of Assyria in

the Nineteenth Century

In contrast to Egypt, or for that matter Greece and Rome, Mesopotamian civilization left no magnificent ruins that could tell the visitor about past glory. Only grass-covered huge mounds stood in the plains, and some travellers in the region did not even notice them, thinking they were features of the natural landscape.² It was only in the early nineteenth century that the European fascination with the “sublime” in nature and history opened the eyes to the grandeur of the mounds. Austen Henry Layard (1817–94), one of the first explorers in these lands, spoke of “mighty ruins in the midst of deserts, defying, by their very desolation and lack of definite form, the description of the traveller.” His first view of the mound known as Nimrud made on him an “impression that ... was one never to be forgotten” (Layard 1903: 311).

Layard was in no doubt that these mounds covered the ruins of ancient cities, although neither he nor anyone else had any idea of the stratigraphic complexity of these *tells*, which had in many cases been inhabited for millennia. The dream of digging here in order to expose the ancient Assyrian palaces and temples was in part inspired by the work carried out by the “Resident” for the East India Company in Baghdad, Claudius Rich, who had visited and studied the site of Nineveh in 1820. He had made careful measurements of the mounds and collected antiques from the local people (Rich 1836). One day he had been shown an underground kitchen on the mound with the prophet Jonah’s grave, where the locals had uncovered stones with carved reliefs. A corridor lined with such relief slabs had been partly excavated, but the villagers had filled most of it again since it went underneath other houses that were in danger of being undermined by their efforts (Rich 1836 II: 31). An important building was clearly lying hidden in the ground underneath the modern village.

The work done by Rich, and the collection of objects he had acquired – a collection that ended up in the British Museum – came to play a major role for the pioneers who initiated Assyria’s archaeological exploration. Rich’s published account inspired Jules Mohl, the secretary of the French Asiatic Society and a very influential man in scientific circles in France, to dream of bringing back glorious antiques from Assyria to the Louvre in Paris. Mohl managed to persuade the authorities to create the position of a French consul in Mosul, and a young man called Paul Émile Botta (1802–1870) was appointed in 1841. Part of his task was to start excavations at Nineveh, in particular on the huge mound known as Kuyunjik, and Mohl had secured funds specifically for this purpose.

This was the time of amateur archaeology, when archaeological techniques were still rather primitive and people without any special knowledge of the past were supposed to produce history by digging holes in the ground. The large mounds in Assyria had been accumulated through millennia, with

settlement following settlement and new dwellings constructed on top of the ruins of old ones. In many cases the top layers contained the ruins of the Neo-Assyrian period (ca. 1000–612 BCE). After the fall of the empire, only the ancient Assyrian city of Arba'il (modern Erbil) remained an important urban center, which it is still today.

The ancient city of Nineveh had been truly gigantic, with walls that surrounded an urban area some three kilometers wide and more than five kilometers long. Within this space were two mounds, Nebi Yunus and Kuyunjik; the first was still covered by houses crowding around the mosque; but only a tiny village covered one corner of Kuyunjik. Here Botta was faced with a mound that was almost a kilometer long and over twenty meters high. There was nothing to be seen on the surface that could tell him where to begin his excavations and what to expect.

Botta sent a team of local men armed with spades and picks across the river to Kuyunjik, hoping that interesting artifacts would turn up. Unsurprisingly, the immediate results were not encouraging. The top layers on the mound were very disturbed by later settlement and agricultural activities, and the large palaces that indeed existed here were hidden so deep under the surface that Botta never reached them. Potsherds, bricks, and fragments of stone were produced, but Botta was naturally disappointed.

However, one day villagers from a site called Khorsabad, located some 20 kilometers northeast of Nineveh, came to visit him with the claim that they had found Assyrian reliefs under their houses. So he sent some workmen to check on this report, and they returned with a confirmation of the claims. Botta thereupon moved his activities to Khorsabad, where he immediately began to uncover the ruins of a gigantic palace. Like Nineveh, although on a smaller scale, Khorsabad was surrounded by huge walls that formed a square of about four square kilometers, with an acropolis in the shape of a large mound at one end of the city. This was where Botta began his work.

We now know that Khorsabad was built by the Assyrian king Sargon II at the end of the eighth century BCE, named Dur-Šarrukin, and abandoned shortly after the king's death; but Botta had no way of knowing all this. In fact, he did not even know what kind of a building he was excavating and prudently referred to it as "a monument." The cuneiform writing system was still a mystery to interested scholars, and the reports on Assyrian history found in the Hebrew Bible and various Greek historians were imprecise and often seriously garbled. Botta's excavations produced a significant number of long inscriptions that eventually played an important part in the decipherment of cuneiform, but it took ten years before scholars could begin to read them.

It turned out that excavating on the acropolis of Khorsabad was a relatively simple project, for Botta operated in an area where relief slabs were standing along all the walls of a royal palace. Botta could simply follow these walls to

draw up a plan of the building. In this way he uncovered a number of rooms that had once formed part of an enormous edifice whose rooms were adorned with large slabs of alabaster covered with images cut in low relief. These showed military campaigns with Assyrian soldiers attacking enemy cities, and in other places ritual and ceremonial scenes involving men who were obviously rulers or high officials. At the main gates in the building stood colossal figures of human-headed bulls, some up to six meters high, obviously guarding the entrances.

The sensational results of Botta's work were communicated to the learned world by Jules Mohl in Paris (Mohl 1845), and in May 1847 the Louvre could open the first exhibition in the world with Assyrian sculptures. Botta's workmen had laboriously transported some of the heavy sculptures from Khorsabad to the bank of the Tigris and had loaded them onto rafts, which carried their cargo to the port city of Basra. From there the sculptures were sent by boat to Europe. Obviously Botta could only take down and send a limited number of his finds. After returning to Europe, he never resumed his work as an excavator, but he produced an elaborate report together with the artist Flandin, whose drawings of the reliefs, both those brought to Paris and those left behind, gave the publication an exceptional interest, showing the majesty and beauty of Assyrian art and architecture (Botta 1849).

In November 1845, Austen Henry Layard had begun his own activities at another site, the ancient city of Kalḥu now known as Nimrud, which was located south of Mosul on the east side of the Tigris. He came here as a private individual without any permission from the Turkish authorities, and his work was paid for out of the personal funds of the British ambassador in Istanbul, Sir Stratford Canning. Layard tried at first to fool the Ottoman pasha in Mosul by claiming that he was on a hunting expedition.

The site of Nimrud was very much like Khorsabad, with an enormous mound, 650 by 350 meters in length and width, representing the acropolis of a large town whose walls could still be seen surrounding an area of some four square kilometers. Layard, accompanied by a friend from Mosul and six workers hired from the neighboring villages, began to scan the ground, searching for remains of reliefs which would indicate that he might find here what Botta had discovered at Khorsabad. In fact, on his first day of work Layard managed to locate not just one but two palaces. In both buildings he uncovered a few stone blocks, but to his disappointment they only carried inscriptions and no reliefs.

In the course of the next weeks of excavation one of the palaces, located in the north-western corner of the mound, turned out to be a veritable treasure-house with hundreds of meters of reliefs lining the walls of several rooms. Of particular importance was the discovery of the throne-room of the palace. At one end of this 50 meter long room stood the platform for the throne, and behind it was a large relief depicting two kings in a ritual pose approaching a

sacred tree. Along one of the walls Layard found a series of images depicting a king hunting lions and wild bulls, plus a number of military campaigns, with Assyrian armies attacking and conquering various foreign cities. Only about half of the slabs originally adorning the throne-room were preserved, as most of the opposite long wall had disappeared in antiquity. The main gates of the room were guarded by colossal figures of lions and bulls with majestic human heads.

Layard had found the oldest Assyrian palace known to this day that had been decorated with relief slabs; it had been built around 865 BCE by King Aššurnāṣirpal II. When Layard presented his discoveries to the public in a hugely successful book, published in two volumes in 1849, the cuneiform texts were still undeciphered, and Layard thought he had been excavating the ruins of the Assyrian capital city of Nineveh, and therefore gave his book the title “Nineveh and its Remains.” The book is an engaging account of the excavations, but also of Layard’s own experiences in the exotic lands of the Middle East. It includes descriptions of his visit to the main shrine of the Yezidis, the so-called “Devil-worshippers,” Layard’s complex relations with the Ottoman authorities in Mosul, his meetings with local Arab tribesmen, and his contacts with the Christian communities, the Nestorians, which at the time were under threat from a group of Kurdish tribal leaders. The book created great interest in the ancient Assyrians and went through many editions. For the British public, it provided important background information on the sculptures that were arriving from Assyria to be exhibited in the British Museum (see [Figures 31.1](#) and [31.2](#)). An abbreviated version was translated into several languages.

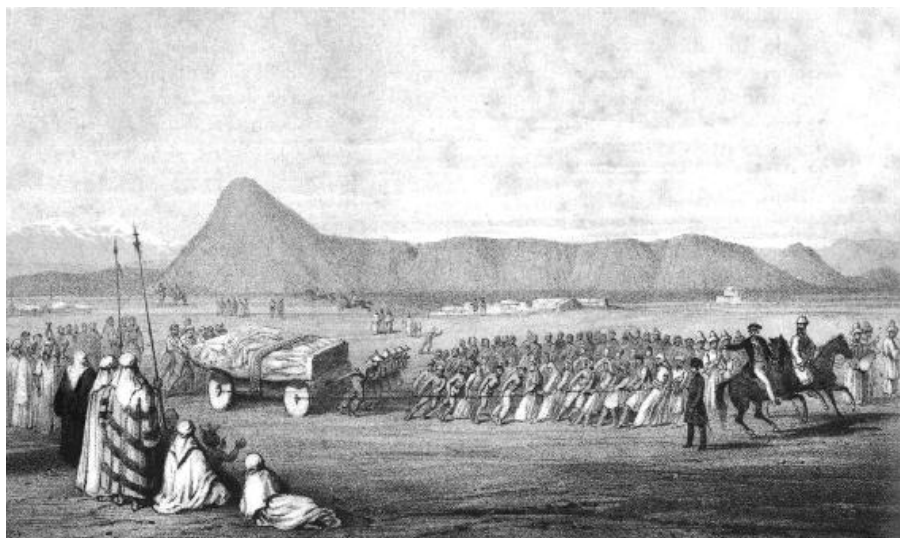


Figure 31.1 Transportation of a monumental bull colossus from the ruins of Kalḫu (in the background) to the bank of the Tigris during the excavations undertaken by Layard.

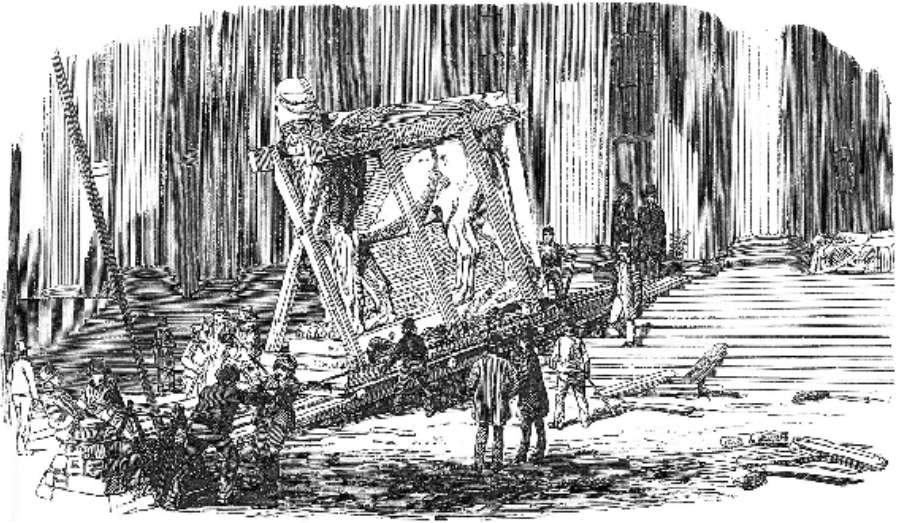


Figure 31.2 Arrival of an Assyrian bull colossus at the British Museum in London. Illustration in *Illustrated London News* 28 February 1852: 184.

Source: Reproduced with permission of M.T. Larsen.

In the meantime, Layard had gone back to his job as an unpaid assistant to the ambassador in Istanbul. His book, published while he was there, immediately turned him into a celebrity. Lord Ellesmere, the president of the Royal Asiatic Society, declared that his was “the greatest achievement of our time,” and that “no man living has done so much or told it so well.” It was clear that a new expedition to Assyria was a possibility, and the Trustees of the British Museum secured funds for such an undertaking.

Layard first turned his attention to Kuyunjik, where, having better luck than Botta, he had made some significant discoveries during his earlier expedition; most importantly, he had found there a vast palace built by Sennacherib around 700 BCE. He now expanded his work and uncovered hundreds of relief slabs, most of which he eventually had to leave behind, sometimes not even recording them in the form of drawings. In order to access the areas with the reliefs, he dug tunnels into the mound and then simply followed the walls of rooms, corridors, and courtyards – the rooms themselves were normally not excavated. Layard, claiming that this was a reasonable procedure, described his efforts as follows:

The subterranean passages were narrow, and were propped up when necessary either by leaving columns of earth, as in mines, or by wooden beams. These long galleries, dimly lighted, lined with the remains of ancient art, broken urns projecting from the crumbling sides, and the wild Arab and hardy Nestorian wandering through their intricacies, or working in their dark recesses, were singularly picturesque.

Despite these crude and primitive excavation methods Layard was able to develop some initial ideas on the development of Assyrian art, for it was immediately obvious that the reliefs found at Kuyunjik were quite different from those he had discovered at Nimrud, and, in fact, also quite distinct from the ones from Khorsabad. At Nimrud most figures were standing firmly on a baseline that defined the scene, and this was also true for most of the reliefs from Khorsabad. At Nineveh, in contrast, the perspective of many of the reliefs represented a kind of bird's eye view, with large numbers of smaller figures scattered over mountain areas or other landscape types. This applied in particular to scenes of warfare, where the character of the landscape through which the Assyrian army moved was clearly indicated. Layard was particularly impressed by a series of reliefs that showed the quarrying of the great bull colossi and their transportation across the Assyrian landscape on sleds and rollers (see [Figure 25.3](#)).

One of Layard's most important achievements at Kuyunjik was the discovery of a large room filled with mostly fragmentary clay tablets covered with cuneiform writing. This was the first major find of tablets made in Assyria, for none had been found at Nimrud or at Khorsabad, and it seemed clear that Layard had discovered part of the palace's archive and library, which would eventually – once the texts could be read – provide detailed information about life at the Assyrian court and many other issues. Several thousands of tablets and fragments were taken from this room and shipped to the British Museum.

Another find of singular importance was the so-called “Lachish Room,” whose reliefs showed the capture of the large fortified Judean town of Lachish by the Assyrian king Sennacherib. These reliefs came to play a special role, partly because most of them were taken down and transported to the British Museum, where they served as a brilliant example of the narrative art of the Assyrians. But even more important was that the Lachish reliefs could be linked directly to a passage in the Hebrew Bible about Sennacherib's campaign against Judah, during which he conquered Lachish and laid siege to Jerusalem (Ussishkin 1982). The account of this dramatic event in an inscription left by Sennacherib played an important role in the final decipherment of the cuneiform script (Rawlinson 1851; Larsen 1996: 293–305). A caption accompanying one of the scenes from the Lachish room mentions Sennacherib, providing final proof on whose palace Layard had been excavating ([Figure 26.3](#)).

The French resumed their work at Khorsabad in 1852, when a new consul was appointed at Mosul. The career diplomat Victor Place was instructed by the French Academy to “procure the largest possible number of sculptures, vases, jewelry, cylinder seals, and objects of all kinds which are used in daily life, and which the Assyrian Museum [in the Louvre] completely lacks” (Pillet 1918: 2–3). The idea of archaeology as a treasure hunt aimed at filling the

halls of the national museums in Europe was characteristic for the time, and the rivalry between the British Museum and the Louvre played a large role in the early exploration of Assyria. It is also clear from these lines that Botta had brought back relatively little from his excavations.

Place greatly expanded the activities at Khorsabad and produced what was meant to be a complete plan of the palace. Based on the same tunneling technique that Layard had used, it was not exactly accurate, as later American work on the palace would show, but it was for a very long time the only documented attempt to present a complete and coherent plan of one of the enormous Assyrian palaces (Place 1867). Botta had excavated only one wing of the palace, and Layard's work at Nimrud and Kuyunjik had likewise resulted in plans that remained incomplete, even though Layard calculated that "9880 feet, or nearly two miles, of bas-reliefs, with twenty-seven portals, formed by colossal winged bulls and lion-sphinxes" had been uncovered in the gigantic palace at Kuyunjik (Layard 1853: 589). As we now know, Layard seems to have excavated only about half of the palace (Russell 1991).

In the spring of 1851 Layard had left Assyria, never to return. The following year Place had begun his work at Khorsabad. It was at this juncture that the British Museum decided to send out Hormuzd Rassam, a native of Mosul, who had been Layard's close assistant, to maintain the British interests in the exploration of the Assyrian sites. He was a young man of twenty-three years, the younger brother of the British vice-consul at Mosul, and Layard had brought him back to England at the end of his first season of work at Nimrud so he might get an education (Reade 1993).

He resumed the activities at Kuyunjik and Nimrud, and both he and Place now also turned their attention to another Assyrian site, known as Qal'at Širqaṭ, which was located on the western bank of the Tigris some 50 kilometers south of Nimrud. As it turned out, they were both unable to deal with this complex site and did not make any major discoveries there. At Nineveh, however, their competition gave rise to a bitter controversy that severely damaged their relationship.

Place and the British resident in Baghdad, Colonel Henry Creswicke Rawlinson, who was deeply involved in the decipherment of cuneiform and had a supervisory role in the British archaeological effort, had reached an agreement concerning a division of Nineveh's main mound, Kuyunjik. Place was to have exclusive rights to dig one half, Rassam the other. The idea was that both countries had a claim to this site, since Botta had been the first to work there. This proved to be intolerable for Rassam, who wanted to explore the northern, now French part of the mound, especially since he felt that his own sector was proving less interesting. Since Place did actually not work at Kuyunjik because of a lack of funds, Rassam decided on an "experimental examination of the spot at night, and only waited for a good opportunity and a bright moonlight for [the] nocturnal adventure." On December 20, 1853, he

sent a small group of trusted workers across the river in order to dig in three locations he had marked for them. Their first efforts provided no results; the second night they found a wall with pitiful remains of reliefs where only feet were preserved. The third night, his last chance before his activities were bound to be observed by the French in Mosul, Rassam personally supervised the clandestine work:

My instinct did not deceive me; for one division of the workmen, after three or four hours' hard labor, were rewarded by the first grand discovery of a beautiful bas-relief in a perfect state of preservation, representing the king, who was afterwards identified as Assur-bani-pal, standing in a chariot, about to start on a hunting expedition, and his attendants handing him the necessary weapons for the chase.

(Rassam 1897: 25–6)

Rassam had discovered a new palace, built by the last significant Assyrian king Assurbanipal in the seventh century BCE. Most of the palace was heavily destroyed and eroded so that only the lowest parts of the reliefs had survived, but in some rooms Rassam made spectacular discoveries: reliefs that represented the epitome of Assyrian visual arts, with depictions of the royal lion-hunt standing out as particularly impressive. Rassam also discovered large numbers of cuneiform tablets, vital additions to the palace library discovered in Sennacherib's palace by Layard.

The Crimean War that broke out in 1853 and involved Russia, Turkey, England, and France made further archaeological activities in Assyria very difficult, and both Place and Rassam returned to Europe. Place's efforts during years of hard work in Assyria ended in disaster. The main finds from Khorsabad were sent on rafts to the south in order to be loaded onto a ship at Basra, but things went catastrophically wrong in the marshes south of Baghdad when the rafts sank and disappeared in the river. Of the 235 cases sent off from Mosul only twenty-eight survived. Nearly all of the colossi and reliefs from Khorsabad were lost. Almost all of Place's personal belongings were gone, including his notes and plans from the excavation. Only a trumpet and a fish wrapped in a straw mat were saved (Pillet 1962).

While this sad event marked the end of French excavations in Assyria, the British Museum continued to send Rassam out to work both in the north and the south of Iraq. His most interesting discovery in Assyria was made at a small site called Balawat, where he found well-preserved huge gates decorated with fourteen bronze bands showing scenes from the wars and other activities of the ninth-century kings Aššurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III. A reconstruction of these monumental gates now stands in the British Museum together with most of the original bronze bands (Barnett 2008; Schachner 2007). Otherwise archaeology in Assyria was dead for a long time, and the British Museum clearly felt that it now possessed a sufficient and satisfactory

sample of Assyrian art.

Twentieth Century Excavations of Assyrian Sites

At the beginning of the twentieth century British archaeologists working on behalf of the British Museum returned to Kuyunjik. They included Leonard William King and Reginald Campbell Thompson, who found the Temple of Nabû, the god of writing. In 1927 a new series of campaigns directed by Campbell Thompson led to the discovery of the Ištar temple (Thompson 1934; Reade 2005). Max Mallowan, a member of Campbell Thompson's team, dug a deep sounding on the mound, a pioneering effort that helped define the sequence of prehistoric periods in Assyria (Thompson and Mallowan 1933).

At this point, archaeological interest was focused primarily on the south of Iraq, where tens of thousands of mounds are spread across the landscape, and where the beginnings of what became the classic Mesopotamian civilization were waiting to be uncovered. Large cities reaching back to the fourth millennium BCE were excavated and large numbers of cuneiform texts written in Sumerian and Akkadian were brought to light.

Germany now also began to take part in the exploration of the ancient Near East. The newly founded Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft selected a series of royal cities in various countries for excavation, including the enormous Hittite capital Ḫattuša in central Anatolia as well as Babylon, the ancient capital of Babylonia, in southern Iraq, where work was conducted from 1898 to 1917 under the direction of Robert Koldewey (Koldewey 1913; Andrae 1952). Here, a young man trained as an architect, Walter Andrae, took part in the excavations, learning advanced excavation and recording techniques from Koldewey. In 1903 Andrae moved to Qal'at Širqaṭ in the north, the site of the ancient city of Ashur, Assyria's first capital, and worked there every year until the beginning of the First World War in 1914.

As mentioned before, Place and Rassam had tried their luck at Qal'at Širqaṭ half a century earlier, but without significant results. The site represented substantial archaeological challenges, for even though it had served as the capital of Assyria until Aššurnāširpal II moved his residence to Nimrud in the ninth century BCE, it did not contain the huge palatial complexes that had been uncovered at Nimrud, Khorsabad, and Kuyunjik. Consequently, one could not simply look for a wall with reliefs and then follow it. Excavators had to work with mud brick architecture as in southern Mesopotamia, and the site's intricate and enormously complex stratigraphy created additional problems.

With Andrae's excavations at Ashur archaeology in Assyria entered a new

phase, away from treasure hunt to a new emphasis on stratigraphic analysis and a detailed understanding of the exact location and context of finds. There was no way Andrae could conduct meaningful excavations here in the manner adopted by Botta, Layard, Place, or Rassam. His work in the end produced a wealth of new information concerning the history of Assyria from the third millennium until the fall of the Assyrian empire in 612 BCE (Andrae 1938).

In Ashur Andrae uncovered several temples, of which the two most important ones were dedicated to the national god Assur, who shared his name with the site itself, and to the goddess Ištar, whose sanctuary could be traced back to very modest beginnings in the early third millennium BCE (Andrae 1922). Temples had in fact been found both at Nimrud and at Khorsabad (although Place did not understand them as such, labeling the area where they were found the “harem”). But the buildings at Ashur had a long and complicated history, with numerous reconstruction efforts that could be related to and elucidated by foundation documents in cuneiform.

The temple to the god Assur was located on a rocky spur that juts out into the river Tigris, and in a band along the northern edge of the city lay a series of ziggurats, palaces, and temples. This area was the main focus of Andrae’s activities, but he also worked extensively in other parts of the town, where he found many private houses. This was in fact the first time that such urban areas were investigated in Assyria. In one sector Andrae uncovered an entire urban neighborhood with a large number of Neo-Assyrian houses, large and small (Miglus 1996).

Some 10,000 cuneiform texts came to light in the course of Andrae’s excavations, and thanks to the meticulous recording of the finds it is often possible to study the archaeological contexts from which they emerged (Pedersén 1985–6). Many came from the area where the main temples and public buildings were located, but others were found in private houses. In the ruins of one of these houses, a large library belonging to a family of incantation priests was recovered, while in other instances Andrae found just a handful of documents, often title deeds to the house and proof of ownership of slaves. Projects directed by Johannes Renger and Stefan Maul in Berlin and Heidelberg have reinvestigated in recent years the finds from Andrae’s excavations at Ashur (Marzahn and Salje 2003).

Andrae’s work established the basis for an entirely new understanding of Assyrian history, reaching back at least to the late third millennium. However, the early phases of this history were only dimly illuminated by the finds from Ashur. A few royal building inscriptions dating to the first centuries of the second millennium BCE were found, mentioning early kings and their work on city walls and temples. They seemed to show that Ashur was a typical provincial city-state like so many known from southern Iraq.

But shortly after Andrae’s excavations at Ashur had come to an end, a

drastically different picture of this early Ashur began to emerge, thanks to the discovery of large archives of cuneiform tablets in central Anatolia, more than 1,000 kilometers away from Ashur. These tablets showed that Ashur, during the period known to archaeologists as the Middle Bronze Age, had played a central role in the commercial networks that crisscrossed the Near East and Iran, with links to Central Asia and the Indus valley. Traders from Ashur had established a series of commercial colonies in central Anatolia, with their administrative center at Kaniš, modern Kültepe, a site some 20 kilometers northeast of the modern Turkish city of Kayseri. Illicit diggings there had produced thousands of cuneiform texts since the 1890s, many of which were bought by European and American museums and collections. Efforts to publish them in a serious manner began in the wake of World War I. In 1948 regular excavations were initiated at Kültepe under the direction of Tahsin Özgüç, who uncovered large palaces and temples on the main mound and hundreds of private houses in the lower town. Many of these turned out to have belonged to Assyrian traders and their families, and they contained the archives left when the settlement was burnt down in ca. 1835 BCE. Until today some 23,000 texts have been found, and they have shown that during the period from around 2000–1700 BCE Ashur was a major transit center for the international trade (Veenhof and Eidem 2008). Strangely, despite Andrae's meticulous excavations at Ashur, no evidence for this international commercial system was found there, a clear indication that his long years of work did not exhaust the potential of the site.

Between 1928 and 1935, the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago initiated a new investigation of Khorsabad, focused both on the area of the palatial complex excavated by Botta and Place and other areas of the large site. On the terrace in front of Sargon's palace the excavators found a series of smaller palaces that had belonged to high royal officials; and in close proximity to this terrace, they discovered the main temple of the city, dedicated to the god Nabû. Place's plan of the palace was shown to be fundamentally correct, although not nearly as regular and precise as his drawing indicated (Loud 1936; Loud and Altman 1938).

In 1949 British archaeologists returned to Nimrud to continue the work carried out there by Layard and Rassam, now using modern excavation techniques. The excavations were directed by Max Mallowan, followed by David Oates and Jeffrey Orchard, and lasted until 1963 (Mallowan 1966; Joan and David Oates 2001). Much of the work was focused on the acropolis, where the palace of Aššurnāšīrpal II was re-examined and new rooms excavated, and where the first finds of tablets in the palace were made. New buildings, such as a few private houses belonging to palace staff, were excavated, and major governmental buildings such as the Governor's Palace and a temple to the god Nabû were found, as were many tablets. In front of a badly burnt throne in the temple the excavators found the tablets with the

treaty that had been forced on Median chieftains in 672 BCE, sixty years before the sack of Nimrud, smashed by their sons and grandsons, clearly an act of revenge for the indignity and humiliation suffered by their ancestors (Wiseman 1958; Parpola and Watanabe 1988).

Although the lower town of Nimrud was not systematically investigated, one of the main discoveries was in fact made outside the acropolis. The British team discovered the ruins of a vast palatial complex in a corner of the lower town, the military arsenal usually referred to as Fort Shalmaneser, built in the ninth century by Shalmaneser III, the son of Aššurnāṣirpal II, who had built the Northwest Palace on the mound. This enormous complex had been a site for various military activities, but it was found to also have fulfilled a number of other functions. An elaborately carved throne base was discovered in one of the large courtyards, and a large number of precious objects in ivory were found in the storerooms (more came to light in several wells inside the palace on the mound). These carved ivory pieces are of extraordinary beauty. They had originally been covered in gold leaf and served as part of the decoration of elaborate furniture. The gold had been ripped off and the naked ivory had been thrown into the wells by the conquerors of the town at the end of the Assyrian empire in 612 BCE (Mallowan 1978).

Although all this work led to a much better understanding of the site of Nimrud, very few buildings were completely excavated. This was also true for the Northwest Palace, and it fell to an Iraqi team of archaeologists led by Muzahem Hussein to finally produce a complete plan of Aššurnāṣirpal's greatest construction project. In the process Hussein made some extraordinary discoveries: between 1988 and 1992, he detected a series of four royal tombs under the floors of rooms in the private quarters of the palace (Hussein and Suleiman 2000).

These were not the first royal tombs ever found in Assyria. Andrae had discovered a series of king's tombs with large stone sarcophagi underneath the Old Palace in Ashur, but these had all been plundered in antiquity. What Muzahem Hussein found at Nimrud turned out to be queens' tombs, and they were largely intact and full of the most amazing wealth of jewelry, objects of precious metals, and in one sarcophagus layer upon layer of carbonized textiles, the entire wardrobe of a queen brought with her into the grave. Because of the political turmoil in Iraq the objects were stored in the vaults of the central bank in Baghdad and have so far been published and studied only in a preliminary fashion (Hussein and Suleiman 2000; Hussein 2016), but the elaborate jewelry casts new light on the luxurious life led by the inhabitants of the vast Assyrian palaces.

In 1974 a Polish team led by Janusz Meuszynski began its path-breaking work of excavation and documentation at Nimrud. A main goal was to investigate the poorly preserved ruins of a central palace built by Tiglath-pileser III in the eighth century BCE, a building that had been uncovered earlier but never

properly studied. In the course of their work, the excavators discovered a cache of relief slabs, taken down from their original positions in anticipation of reuse elsewhere. The Polish archaeologists also sought to accurately record all the reliefs from Aššurnāṣirpal's palace, locating each slab in its original place and providing detailed documentation for the entire decoration program. This work built upon studies previously undertaken by Julian Reade as part of the British work at the site (Reade 1979a and b, 1980a and b). Meuszynski's death in 1976 put an end to the excavations, but Sobolewski and Paley have carried on the work (Meuszynski 1981; Paley and Sobolewski 1987, 1992). The meticulous documentation thus created has become even more valuable after ISIS destroyed large parts of Aššurnāṣirpal's palace in April 2015.

In the 1950s Iraqi archaeologists began working at Nineveh in an effort to reach a comprehensive understanding of the entire site. Muhammed Ali Mustafa started excavations at Nebi Yunus, while Tariq Madhloom re-excavated and restored some of the most important rooms in the palace of Sennacherib, turning the throne-room suite into an open-air museum. Unfortunately, during the chaos in the mid-1990s several of the reliefs from there were illicitly removed and sold on the antiquities market (Russell 1998), and in April–May 2016, the whole throne-room suite was demolished by ISIS. Madhloom also worked on some of the city's ancient monumental gates, partly in an effort to protect what remained of the site from further encroachment by roads and building projects (Madhloom 1967, 1968, 1969).

Some of the most recent efforts to explore the city of Nineveh have been undertaken between 1987 and 1990 by a team from the University of Berkeley (further work was prevented by political events). David Stronach and Stephen Lumsden were the first to systematically study not only the mound of Kuyunjik but also the lower town, work that showed the huge potential for a real understanding of how the gigantic ancient city was organized and functioned (Stronach and Lumsden 1992; Russell 1991).

The expansion of the Assyrian state that began in the mid-14th century led to the incorporation of huge areas outside the Assyrian heartland. In recent years a number of Assyrian provincial capitals in Syria and southern Turkey have been partly excavated. The most important of these sites, the ancient city of Dur-Katlimmu, has been explored since 1978 by a German team led by Hartmut Kühne (Kühne 2010). Located on the eastern bank of the Khabur river, Dur-Katlimmu had become an important center in the Middle Assyrian period that had reached its greatest extent during the time of the Neo-Assyrian empire in the eighth and seventh centuries. Dur-Katlimmu consists of a tell and a very large lower town, all surrounded by a city-wall. In a palatial building on the tell the excavators discovered an important Middle Assyrian archive (Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996), and in the lower town they found very extensive elite buildings, one of which contained an archive belonging to a high official from the seventh century BCE (Radner 2002). Somewhat

surprisingly the lower town does not seem to have been inhabited by ordinary town-dwellers in more modest houses.

Since 1997 a team led by Timothy Matney has excavated a site called Ziyaret Tepe in the upper Tigris valley. Ziyaret Tepe can be identified with the ancient city of Tušḫan, a major provincial center in the late phase of the Assyrian empire. During this period, Tušḫan guarded the northern border of the Assyrian Empire, housed a regional governor and his staff, and served as a center for exploiting the natural resources (timber, stone, and metals) of the Taurus Mountains in the north.

Archaeology in Assyria began with the exploration of the huge palatial complexes in the Assyrian heartland and the search for impressive artifacts to be displayed in the national museums, which grew in importance in the nineteenth century. Excavations were at that time large scale operations usually conducted with poor digging and recording methods. While the latter is regrettable, it must be said that the application of modern excavation methods, when faced with these enormous buildings, is only possible within research projects on a much smaller scale.

One problem is that the intense preoccupation with palaces and temples led to a situation where we are far from a proper understanding of the late Assyrian royal cities in their entirety. Mallowan suggested that the people in the lower town of Nimrud lived in tents, which goes to show how little we know about the way in which these large urban sites functioned. It has been suggested that a third of the terrain within the walls of Nineveh was taken over by the military during the Neo-Assyrian period, which would tell us something significant about Assyrian urbanism; and the Berkeley excavations showed that a particular area north of Kuyunjik was taken over by various industries and crafts. But we have no idea of how the various city quarters were organized, where the elites and the ordinary people lived (Lumsden 2005). The study of Andrae's excavation records from Ashur has given us some understanding of that city, especially during the Neo-Assyrian period (Miglus 1996), but Ashur was fundamentally different from the large, centrally planned royal metropolises further north.

Interest in Assyrian landscape archaeology began with the American excavations at Khorsabad in the 1930s, when Thorkild Jacobsen examined some of the extensive canal systems that had been constructed by Assyrian kings to secure a steady water supply for the large royal cities. Jacobsen and Seton Lloyd (1935) investigated and described an aqueduct built by Sennacherib at Jerwan not long after 700 BCE, a type of structure unknown elsewhere before Roman times. The canal to which the aqueduct belonged was traced from the gorge of the Gomel River, where we find the well-known "Bavian inscriptions," to the Khosr River above Nineveh. David Oates (1968) identified the elaborate canal system that served the capital city Kalḫu, and Julian Reade (1978) traced an extensive system of canals in the regions north

of Nineveh. In recent years satellite photography has facilitated the reconstruction of this vast hydraulic network, mostly created during the reign of Sennacherib. Jason Ur has suggested that it was designed in large part to provide irrigation for an intensified agricultural production in northern Assyria, from which the huge imperial cities profited more than anyone else (Ur 2005; see also [Chapter 1](#) of this volume).

The rediscovery of ancient Assyria and the decipherment of the cuneiform writing system were met with great interest in Europe and the US in the nineteenth century, primarily because the new discoveries seemed to have a substantial impact on Christianity and the understanding of the sacred history outlined in the Bible. According to the Bible mankind's earliest history was closely connected with Mesopotamia – the Garden of Eden, Ur of the Chaldees, Babylon and Nineveh are some of the names that appear many times in the books of the Bible. Today, however, the preoccupation with Biblical scripture has lost some of its interest, and other concerns, including the social, economic, and environmental history of Assyria, have become more prominent.

The increased interest in the Neo-Assyrian period during the past decades is to a significant extent due to the large “State Archives of Assyria” project directed by the Helsinki scholar Simo Parpola, which has made a large part of the documents found in the palaces on Kuyunjik available to the scholarly community. The study of the diplomatic and political correspondence of the Assyrian kings has resulted in a much better understanding of the history and structure of the Assyrian empire. Combining this recent philological and historical work with a new archaeological effort in Assyria would undoubtedly lead to important new insights, but the destruction of many Assyrian sites by ISIS terrorists, and the ongoing political unrest in the area in which Assyrian civilization once flourished, present formidable challenges to the progress of Assyrian studies.

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Further Reading

An extensive history of the early exploration of Assyria is found in Larsen 1996. For Layard see Waterfield 1963. Russell 1998 discusses the decoration of Assurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace in Nimrud. The texts from the British excavations at Nimrud have been published in the series *Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud 1–6*, British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 1972–2001. The ivories are published in *Ivories from Nimrud 1–6*; see especially Herrmann, Laidlaw, and Coffey 2009. For the reliefs from Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh see Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998. The *State Archives of Assyria* series (Helsinki), which has currently reached volume 19, provides editions of many Neo-Assyrian texts from Nineveh and other sites. The results

of the German excavations at Ashur have been published in a series of monographs by various authors in *Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft*. The excavations at Dur Katlimmu are documented in the series *Berichte der Ausgrabung Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad/Dūr-Katlimmu*, with volume 22 published in 2016.

Notes

- 1 I wish to thank Julian Reade for his constructive and enlightening comments.
- 2 Niebuhr 1774–78 presents a map of Nineveh where the long walls are absent.

CHAPTER 32

Assyrian Christians

Aaron Michael Butts

Introduction

It is well known that various individuals and groups associated with Syriac Christianity and the Syriac heritage are today called Assyrians.¹ What is less understood is when, how, and why this identification came about. This has unfortunately led to a good deal of controversy and misunderstanding. Within the Syriac communities, the so-called “name debate” continues to be a hotly discussed topic, especially in the diaspora (see recently Atto 2011).

Discussions about the relationship of the Syriac heritage to the ancient Assyrians are also to be found within the academy, with some scholars supporting the connection, e.g., Parpola (2004: 21–2), and others doubting it, e.g., Coakley (1992: 6, 366 [“bogus ethnology”]). The present essay is not concerned with evaluating the legitimacy of connections between the Syriac heritage and ancient Assyria. Rather, it assumes as a given that certain individuals and groups associated with the Syriac heritage have in the past identified as Assyrian and continue to do so until the present. The essay does, however, take up the task of outlining the historical background for the events that led to the promotion of this identification in the nineteenth century and to the ensuing development of an Assyrian ideology within Syriac communities.

The essay begins with a discussion of the use of Assyria and Assyrian in pre-modern Syriac sources. It then looks at how nineteenth-century literature from the West represented Syriac Christians as Assyrian. Following this brief foray into the western literature, the essay turns to the use of Assyrian as an identity marker in Syriac communities from the mid-nineteenth century onward, beginning first with the Church of the East and then moving to the larger Syriac heritage. The essay concludes with a recapitulation of the previous sections, drawing connections between them.

Assyria and Assyrian in Pre-Modern Syriac Sources

In pre-modern Syriac sources, the term *ʾāthorāyā* “Assyrian” is not the typical self-designation for individuals belonging to the Syriac heritage, whether East Syriac or West Syriac. The typical self-designations, rather, are *ʾārāmāyā* “Aramean” and *suryāyā* “Syrian,” along with its truncated variant *surāyā* (for the relationship of the latter two, see Heinrichs 1993: 102 n. 2).² The early Syriac author Bardaiṣan (154–222), for instance, is described both as *ʾārāmāyā* and *suryāyā* in the Syriac version of Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Ecclesiastical History* (Wright and McLean 1898: 243.18 and 183.7, respectively), which was translated before 420 (Van Rompay 1994: 73 n. 15). The adjectives *ʾārāmāyā* and *suryāyā* serve as the typical self-designations for Syriac Christians throughout the pre-modern sources.³

While *ʾāthorāyā* “Assyrian” is not the typical self-designation for Syriac Christians in pre-modern Syriac sources, Assyria (*ʾāthor*) and Assyrian (*ʾāthorāyā*) do occur in several senses throughout this period. First and foremost, *ʾāthor* refers to the ancient empire of Assyria and the area surrounding its last capital Nineveh. In the Syriac translation of the Hebrew Bible, for instance, Hebrew *ʾaššur* is often rendered by Syriac *ʾāthor* (Kings 15:19, 20, 29; 17:6, 23; 18:11; etc.). Following this usage, the gentilic adjective *ʾāthorāyā* designated a person from the ancient empire of Assyria or more specifically its capital Nineveh. From this primary sense of *ʾāthor*, at least two secondary senses developed in pre-modern Syriac literature.

First, Syriac *ʾāthor* came to refer to the city of Mosul (Fiey 1965–86: 2.570), which was built on the west bank of the Tigris directly across from the ancient ruins of Nineveh. This is the primary meaning of *ʾāthor* relayed by the native Syriac lexicographers Ishoʿ bar ʿAli (ninth century; Hoffmann 1874: 63)⁴ and Ḥasan bar Bahlul (mid-tenth century; Duval 1888–1901: 1.322). This meaning of *ʾāthor* is also found in the Arabic geographer Yaquṭ (d. 1228) who states that Mosul was called *ʾathūru* before it was called *al-mawṣil* (Wüstenfeld 1866–1873: 1.119.16–19). With *ʾāthor* referring to the city of Mosul, the gentilic adjective *ʾāthorāyā* was, then, used as a designation for a citizen of Mosul. It is probably in this sense that the Syriac Orthodox patriarch and historian Michael the Great (d. 1199) called ʾImād al-Dīn Zangī (ca. 1085–1146), who was the *atabeg* of Mosul, an “Assyrian (*ʾāthorāyā*) pig” in his *Chronicle* (Chabot 1899–1910: 3.261 [French translation]; 4.630.2.24 [Syriac text]). This meaning continued to be used in Classical Syriac at least until the turn of the twentieth century (see Fiey 1965: 156 with n. 53; Heinrichs 1993: 105). In addition, it is found in the Neo-Aramaic dialect of Ṭuroyo (Ritter 1979: 352 [387]), which is spoken in the Ṭur ʿAbdin region in South Eastern Turkey. This use of *ʾāthorāyā* as a gentilic adjective for Mosul may well also explain why the Protestant mission in Mosul (1849–60) chose the name Assyrian Mission for “geographical reasons” (Anderson 1872: 8–106, esp. 83; see also Fiey 1965: 148–9).⁵ Finally, some scattered evidence suggests that the geographic sense of *ʾāthorāyā* extended beyond Mosul to

include the area around Arbela (modern Erbil) and Karka d-Beth Slokh (modern Kirkuk) (Brock 1982: 16–17; Salvesen 1998: 157).

Second, based on the fact that the Biblical Assyrians were the enemies of Israel, *ʾāthorāyā* was used with a metaphorical meaning for the enemies of Christians. This metaphorical use is often accompanied by imagery based on the Biblical depictions of the Assyrians (for which see [Chapter 29](#)), such as the Assyrians as the instruments of God’s wrath found in Is. 10:5–34. The metaphorical meaning of *ʾāthorāyā* was especially developed for the Persians.⁶ Already in the fourth century, Ephrem (d. 373), the most widely-known of all Syriac authors, referred to Persia as “filthy Assyria (*ʾāthor*), mother of corruption” (Beck 1961: 21.24 [Syriac text]; 24 [German translation]). This metaphor was further developed in the sixth-century *Life of John of Tella*, in which the term *ʾāthorāyā* serves as a negative epithet for the Persians on several occasions. The text narrates, for example, that after the Persian *marzbān* and his soldiers pursued John of Tella into the mountains around Sinjār they “descended on him like wild animals with swords drawn and bows out like Assyrians (*ʾāthorāʾith*)” (Brooks 1907: 67.15–17), adopting the Biblical imagery of the Assyrians as apt warriors. More direct biblical phraseology occurs at the beginning of the *Life of John of Tella* where the Persian capture of the city of Kallinikos in 542 is referred to as the “Rod of the Assyrian (*ʾāthorāyā*)” (Brooks 1907: 38.16), invoking Is. 10:5 (“Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger” [NRSV]). The same Biblical verse is referenced in the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* (written after 506), which recounts the destruction brought by the Persians as follows: “(God) struck us with the hands of the Assyrian (*ʾāthorāyā*), which is called the rod of anger” (ed. Chabot 1927: 240.2–3 [Syriac text]; Trombley and Watt 2000: 5 [English translation]). The historian John of Ephesus (d. 589) also refers to the Persians as Assyrians, describing the conquest of Dara by the Persians in 566 as “its capture and its deliverance into the hands of the Assyrians (*ʾāthorāyē*)” (ed. Brooks 1935–36: 292.6 [Syriac text]; 221 [Latin translation]). Following the Arab conquests, the metaphor of Assyrians as the enemies of Christianity was naturally extended to the Arab conquerors. The eighth-century *Chronicle of Zuqnin* (formerly called the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel Maḥre*) presents an elaborate description of the Arab conquerors as Assyrians based on Isaiah 10:5–24 (Chabot 1933 [Syriac text]; Harrak 1999 [English translation]; for analysis, see Harrak 2004). Thus, in the pre-modern period, Syriac authors at times used *ʾāthorāyā* “Assyrian” as an epithet for their enemies (for additional examples, see Harrak 2004: 52–3).

While Assyrian (*ʾāthorāyā*) is not the usual self-designation for Syriac Christians in pre-modern sources, a connection between Syriac Christians and the ancient Assyrians is occasionally made in this period. In the Syriac *History of Qardagh* (written ca. 600–630 CE according to Walker 2006), the main protagonist Qardagh is described as being “from the stock of the

kingdom of the Assyrians (*’āthorāyē*),” with his father descending from the house of Nimrod and his mother from the house of Sennacherib (Abbeloos 1890: 12.9–13 [Syriac text]; Walker 2006: 20 [English translation]). Slightly later on in the *History*, Qardagh is said to become the “prefect of Assyria (*’āthor*)” (Abbeloos 1890: 15.5 [Syriac text]; Walker 2006: 22 [English translation]), and Arbela is described as “the city of the Assyrians (*’āthorāyē*)” (Abbeloos 1890: 16.1 [Syriac text]; Walker 2006: 22 [English translation]). Walker (2006: 248–9; 2006–07) has argued that the connection of Qardagh with Assyrian lineage may be due to the fact that the saint’s shrine in North Iraq was situated on the ruins of a Neo-Assyrian temple. According to this argument, the area around Erbil would have preserved some awareness of its Assyrian past (similarly Brock 1982: 16–17).⁷

It is clear from the examples presented here that the term *’āthorāyā* “Assyrian” in pre-modern Syriac sources is used in its most basic sense as a gentilic adjective for ancient Assyria and its capital Nineveh. From this primary meaning, two secondary uses developed: 1. a gentilic adjective for Mosul, as well as possibly the area around Erbil and Kirkuk; 2. a metaphorical use for the enemies of Christians. The adjective *’āthorāyā* is not, however, the typical self-designation for individuals belonging to the Syriac heritage. This function, rather, is filled by the adjectives *’ārāmāyā* “Aramean” and *suryāyā* “Syrian.”

Assyrian Christians in Nineteenth-Century Literature from the West

In mid-nineteenth-century writings by Western archeologists, travelers, and missionaries, Syriac Christians are at times connected with the ancient Assyrians.⁸ An early occurrence of the phrase “Assyrian Christians” is to be found in the *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan and on the Site of Ancient Nineveh* (1836: 1.120) by the British traveler C.J. Rich (1787–21). It seems, however, that by the term “Assyrian Christian” Rich was only referring to geographic location, since in a footnote on the same page he refers to the “Christians of Assyria.” It is noteworthy that Rich gives no indication that Assyrian was a self-designation used by the communities in question.

A more direct connection between Syriac Christians and ancient Assyrians is made by the missionary H. Southgate (1812–94). In his *Narrative of a Visit to the Syrian [Jacobite] Church of Mesopotamia* (1844), Southgate states, “I observed that the Armenians did not know them under the name which I used, *Syriani*; but called them ASSOURI, which struck me the more at the moment from its resemblance to our English name *Assyrians*, from whom they claim

their origin, being sons, as they say, of Assour ...” (80; italics and small capitals in the original). It should first be noted that this report by Southgate does not state that Syriac Christians self-identified as Assyrian, but only that the Armenians called them *asori*.⁹ It does, however, provide a witness to the fact that Syriac Christians themselves claimed an Assyrian lineage already in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁰

The connection between East-Syriac Christians and Assyria was popularized by the British traveler and archeologist A.H. Layard (1817–94). In his *Nineveh and its Remains* (1849), Layard argued that there were good reasons to suppose that the Christians whom he met were “the descendants of the ancient Assyrians” (1.215–16; 2.237). Again, it is important to note that Layard does not claim that they were called Assyrians nor that they called themselves Assyrians – he only states his belief that they were their “descendants.” Layard may well, however, have come to this connection through his archaeological assistant Hormuzd Rassam (1826–1910), who was born in Mosul to a prominent Church of the East family.¹¹

The earliest systematic use of the term “Assyrian” for Syriac Christians seems to have developed in the second half of the nineteenth century within the context of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Mission in Urmia, a city west of Lake Urmia in Northwest Iran (in general, see Coakley 1992: 5–6, 366–7, *passim* as well as Fiey 1965: 149–53 and Murre-van den Berg 1999: 37). By 1870, the term Assyrian had become entrenched in the Anglican vocabulary, at least partly due to the influence of G.P. Badger (1815–88) (Coakley 1992: 65–6). It should be noted that Badger’s advisor was Christian Rassam, the brother of Layard’s assistant Hormuzd Rassam. The use of the term Assyrian in the context of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Mission probably arose in an effort to avoid the term Nestorian; an additional motivating factor may have been an attempt to find a term parallel to Chaldean, which had been introduced by J.S. Assemani (1687–1768) and J.A. Assemani (1710–1782) for Syriac Christians who were in communion with Rome. In the 1880s, the full name of the Anglican mission was established as *The Archbishop of Canterbury’s Mission to the Assyrian Christians* (Coakley 1992: 99–100). Though “Assyrian” became a regular part of the Anglican vocabulary in the West, it was not – or at least only rarely, e.g., by W.A. Wigram (1872–1953) – used by the missionaries themselves in the field (Coakley 1992: 5; Murre-van den Berg 1999: 37).

Assyrian Identity and the Church of the East

It is in the context of the Anglican Mission to Urmia that East-Syriac

Christians likely adopted the term Assyrian as a general self-designation and began to develop a national ideology based on it.¹² This took place during what has been called the “Syrian Awakening” (Murre-van den Berg 1998: 500–4), or “religious renaissance” (Macuch 1987: 818), that occurred in Urmia toward the end of the nineteenth century. Nineteenth-century Urmia was a center of western missionary activity, with the aforementioned Anglican mission (1886–1915) as well as the Presbyterian missionaries of the American Board (1834–1918), the Roman Catholic mission (1839–1918), and the Russian Orthodox mission (1897–1914) (in general, see Murre-van den Berg 1999: 43–74; for the Anglican mission in particular, see Coakley 1992). The presence of missionaries in Urmia led to the accentuation, as well as creation, of confessional divisions among the Syriac Christians in the Urmia and Hakkari regions. At the same time, however, it introduced a unifying factor in the development of Literary Urmia Aramaic, a new literary language based on the spoken Neo-Aramaic dialects (see especially Murre-van den Berg 1999). With the introduction of the printing press in 1840, a number of publications appeared in Literary Urmia Aramaic, including Biblical translations and the periodical *Zahrirē d-Bahrā* “Rays of Light” (1849–1915; see Macuch 1976: 136–87). By 1870, the local Christians had assumed prominent roles in the local literary production, especially in the periodical *Zahrirē d-Bahrā* as well as the slightly later *Qālā da-šrārā* “Voice of Truth” (1896; see Macuch 1976: 194–201) and *Kokhbhā* “The Star” (1906; see Macuch 1976: 206–10). Thus, Literary Urmia Aramaic and the publications written in it provided a common means of expression for the East-Syriac Christians of the area.

An additional unifying factor at this time was the development of a national Assyrian identity. At the end of the 19th century, the concepts of nation and nationalism – probably introduced from Europe – found expression in a number of communities, including the Turks, Kurds, Armenians, and Arabs, as well as the East-Syriac Christians. The connection with the ancient Assyrians, whose civilization had been explored in the Mosul area since the middle of the 19th century, provided the East-Syriac Christians with a national identity. Through the construction of an Assyrian ideology, East-Syriac communities were able to transcend differences, including confessional differences, and unite behind a common national identity. Leading up to World War I, the Assyrian national identity was developed by authors such as Fredon ʾĀthorāyā, who in 1911 wrote an article entitled “Who are the Syrians (*surāyē*) and how should our nation (*ʿumthā*) be established?” (Heinrichs 1993: 110; Macuch 1976: 383).

At this time, Church of the East Christians began to self-identify not only by Classical Syriac ʾāthorāyā “Assyrian” but also by the newly-coined ʾasurāyā “Assyrians” (in general, see Macuch 1987: 818; Heinrichs 1993: 102–8; Joseph 2000: 1–20). The latter term was based on the inherited adjective

surāyā “Syrian” but was updated with an initial glottal stop to mirror *’āthorāyā*.¹³ The change of *surāyā* to *’asurāyā* may have been further facilitated by the Armenian adjective *asori* (Heinrichs 1993: 106–7), since many Armenians are known to have resided in the Urmia and Hakkari regions. In the orthography of the written language, the initial glottal stop of *’asurāyā* was often “cancelled out” by means of a *linea occultans* (Syriac *m̐baṭṭlānā*), an orthographic symbol that indicates an etymological writing that no longer conforms to pronunciation. The writing with *linea occultans* is already found in 1897 in an article in *Zahrirē d-bahrā* entitled “The Kingdom of the Assyrians (*’āthorāyē*) or the (As)Syrians (*’[’]surāyē*) according to the Biblical History and the Antiquities of Nineveh” (Macuch 1976: 142; cited in Heinrichs 1993: 102 n. 3).

The First World War introduced dramatic changes to the Church of the East, as well as to the wider Syriac community more generally. It is estimated that anywhere from a third to a half of the population belonging to the Church of the East lost their lives during the course of the war and its aftermath. Initially forced out of Persia and Turkey, the surviving remnant was forced to settle in Iraq as refugees. During the British Mandate in Iraq, the name Assyrian continued to develop in a nationalistic sense, with some East-Syriac Christians, including the Church of the East Patriarch Eshai Shem’on (1909–75), pressing for the creation of an independent state. The end of the British Mandate in Iraq in 1932 brought further difficulties for the Church of the East, including the massacre of Assyrian civilians by the Iraqi army at Simele in 1933. In the end, a majority of the Church of the East was forced from its native homeland, displaced elsewhere in the Middle East, e.g., Syria, or emigrating to the world-wide diaspora, especially to Europe (Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Great Britain, Greece, and Russia), the USA (Chicago, Detroit, and California), and Australia and New Zealand.

In the aftermath of World War I, the name Assyrian became firmly established as the usual self-identification for individuals belonging to the Church of the East. The creation of modern Syria further reinforced this use of Assyrian, since Syrian now served as the gentilic adjective for Syria. Perhaps more importantly, however, Assyrian identity and ideology continued to be developed, especially in the diaspora, as a way to unify the East-Syriac communities who had originated from different regions, but who now lived side by side in their new homelands. Many individuals and groups connected to the Church of the East continue to self-identify as Assyrian today, with one of the two branches even adopting Assyrian in its official name, the Holy Catholic Apostolic Assyrian Church of the East.¹⁴

Assyrian Identity and the Greater Syriac Heritage

The term Assyrian was occasionally used by some West-Syriac individuals and groups prior to World War I. It gained greater currency following the war as various individuals and groups wished to unite the different Syriac communities, both East-Syriac and West-Syriac, within a single nation of Assyrians. This use of Assyrian was popularized by several writers within the USA.

An early promoter of this use was Naʿūm Fāʾiq (1868-1930) (for whom, see Chuqqī 1936; Macuch 1976: 432–33; Kiraz, in *GEDSH*, 163). Born in 1868 in Amid (modern Diyarbakır, Turkey), Fāʾiq survived the 1895 massacre of Christians there. Throughout his time in Amid, he served as an educator in various schools, and in 1908 he founded the periodical *Kukhbho d-Madhnho* “Star of the East.”¹⁵ In 1912, he immigrated to the USA, living in New Jersey, where he established a new periodical, *Beth Nahrin* (1916–). Fāʾiq, whose ecclesiastical affiliation was Syriac Orthodox, was an ardent promoter of Assyrian nationalism. Among his many contributions to this ideology, his poem “Awake, son of Assyria, awake” is perhaps the most well-known. The text of this poem reads:¹⁶

Awake, son of Assyria (ʿāthor), awake;
see how enlightened the world is;
opportunity is being led out of our hands;
even time is quickly passing away;
awake, son of Assyria, awake.

In vigilance, let us take refuge;
let us ascend to elevate flight;
if we do not awake, without resource,
distress will encounter us in our path;
awake, son of Assyria, awake.

With poems such as this, Fāʾiq encouraged all Syriac Christians, including the Syriac Orthodox, to unite as a single Assyrian nation.¹⁷

Another American promoter of Assyrian nationalism from within the Syriac Orthodox Church was D.B. Perley (1901–79) (for whom see Macuch 1976: 337; Coakley, in *GEDSH*, 326). Perley was born in the village of Kharput in Eastern Turkey, and he immigrated to the USA in 1918 following what in the West-Syriac tradition is called *Sayfo* “the Sword,” i.e., the massacre of Christians in the aftermath of World War I. In 1933, he helped found the Assyrian National Federation. Perley understood his religious identity to be

Syriac Orthodox but his national identity to be Assyrian. He summarized his understanding of the relationship between religion and nation as follows: “The Assyrians, although representing but one single nation as the direct heirs of the ancient Assyrian Empire ... are now doctrinally divided ... No one can coherently understand the Assyrians as a whole until he can distinguish that which is religion or church from that which is nation ...” (Perley, *apud* Malek 1935: 103). In this spirit, Perley proposed uniting all Syriac Christians, whether East- or West-Syriac in religious identity, under the Church of the East Patriarch, or in his words, “under the banner of our *Ethnarch, Mar Eshai Shimun XXI*, our hero, both spiritual and secular” (Perley, *apud* Malek 1935: 112–13; italics in original).

In the last fifty years, West-Syriac Christians have continued to promote Assyrian identity as a means of uniting all Syriac Christians, regardless of religious affiliation, within a single nation. This movement has been particularly strong in the Syriac diaspora communities in Western Europe, especially Germany and Sweden (Yonan 1978; Atto 2011). It has also extended beyond the Syriac Orthodox to include other communities belonging to the Syriac heritage.

Many Syriac Orthodox individuals and groups have resisted the adoption of an Assyrian identity and ideology. As an alternative, some have developed an Aramean identity and ideology (Heinrichs 1993: 111; Brock and Coakley, in *GEDSH*, 31). In 1952, for instance, the Syriac Orthodox patriarch Ignatius Afram Barsoum (1887–1957) wrote a pamphlet entitled *The Syrian Church of Antioch: Its Name and History* in which he rejected the term “Assyrian,” preferring instead Aramean. More recently, the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Syriac Orthodox Church has generally preferred the designation *suryāyā* “Syriac.” Thus, in 1981, the late patriarch Ignatius Zakkā I ʾIwāš (1933–2014) issued an encyclical in which he voiced his support for the designation *suryāyā* over against both Assyrian and Aramean (*al-ʾathūrīya* and *al-ʾārāmīya*, respectively, in the Arabic original).¹⁸ Despite this effort, Assyrian identity and ideology continue to be present within some Syriac Orthodox communities. This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the fact that the birth name of this same patriarch was Sanharīb, the Arabic version of Sennacherib.

Conclusion

In Syriac communities today, one encounters various cultural identity markers that are derived ultimately from ancient Assyria. Syriac children are named Sennacherib, Sargon, and Nebuchadnezzar. The winged lions of Nineveh fly proudly on the Assyrian Christian flag. Syriac Christians have dedicated a bronze statue of Assurbanipal to the city of San Francisco (see [Figure 32.1](#)).

The Akītu festival, the ancient Assyrian New Year, is celebrated, with some celebrants even donning costumes to resemble ancient dress (see the photograph in Baumer 2006: 279). The present essay has explored the complex historical realities that led to the connection between Syriac Christians and ancient Assyria. Before the nineteenth century, *’ārāmāyā* “Aramean” and *suryāyā* “Syrian” – not *’āthorāyā* “Assyrian” – served as the typical self-designation for individuals belonging to the Syriac heritage. The middle of the nineteenth century, however, brought the excavations of Nineveh, the last capital of the ancient Assyrians, and other Assyrian archaeological sites. At roughly the same time, the concepts of nation and nationalism were introduced to Syriac Christians in the Middle East. Thus, the ancient Assyrians provided East-Syriac Christians with a model for a viable national identity. The tragic events of World War I only served to strengthen this identity. In the wake of the war, most East-Syriac Christians were exiled from their homelands, and Assyrian identity was further developed in the diaspora as a means to unite displaced communities. Having suffered their own tragedies in the war, some Syriac Orthodox Christians also adopted an Assyrian identity as a means to unite all Syriac Christians, regardless of religious affiliation, within a single nation. Thus, today, many individuals associated with the Church of the East, as well as others from the broader Syriac heritage, identify as Assyrian.



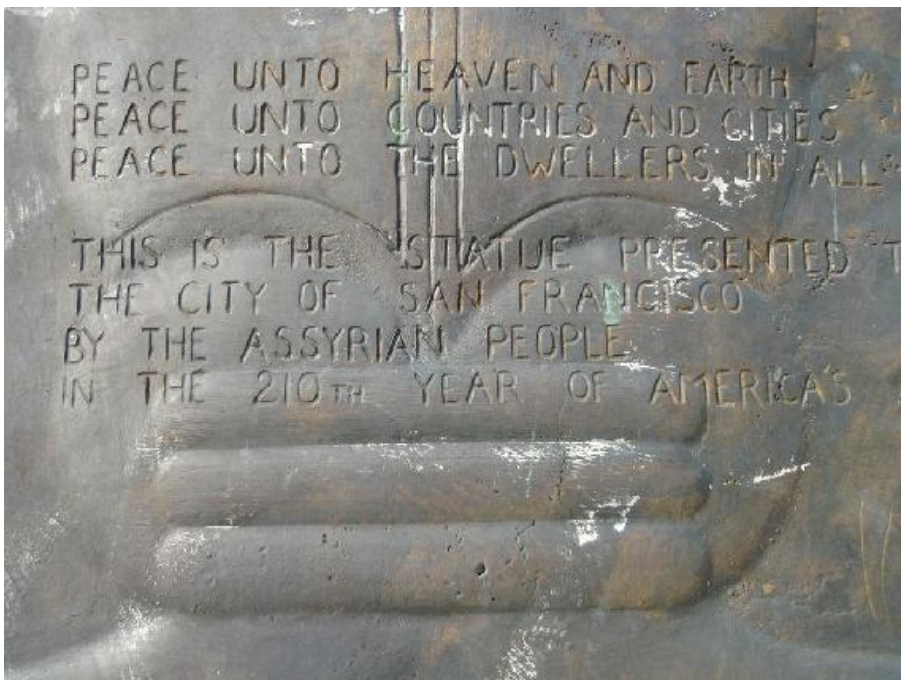


Figure 32.1 Bronze statue of the Assyrian king Assurbanipal, designed by Fred Parhad, an artist of Assyrian descent born in Iraq. The statue, dedicated “by the Assyrian people” to the city of San Francisco, stands near the city’s “Main Library.”

Source: Reproduced with permission of Jacob Rosenberg-Wohl.

Appendix: The Churches of the Syriac Heritage

In this essay, the term Syriac, as well as Syriac Christianity and Syriac heritage, are used for individuals and groups that identify with Syriac linguistic, religious, and/or cultural traditions. Following the Councils of Ephesus (431) and of Chalcedon (451), the Syriac tradition has been divided into several branches: 1. the churches that accept both councils, such as the Melkite Church and the Maronite Church; 2. the West-Syriac branch, which accepts the Council of Ephesus, but not Chalcedon, and includes the Syriac Orthodox Church (for historical overview, see Brock [with Taylor] 2011) and its Uniate continuations, such as the Syriac Catholic Church; 3. the East-Syriac branch, which rejects both councils and which includes the Church of the East (for historical overviews, see Baum and Winkler 2003; Baumer 2006; Teule 2008; Wilmschurst 2000) – itself divided into two branches since 1968 – and its Uniate continuations, such as the Chaldean Catholic Church. The Church of the East and the Syriac Orthodox Church are at times called Nestorian and Jacobite, respectively; these two names, however, are best

avoided for a variety of reasons (see Brock 1996), not the least of which is that the churches themselves do not typically self-identify by them. In addition to the churches that have their roots in the Near East, the Syriac tradition is represented by seven distinct churches in Kerala, India, two of which belong to the East-Syriac tradition (Malabar Catholic Church and Chaldean Syrian Church) and five of which belong to the West-Syriac tradition (Malankara Syriac Orthodox Church, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, Malankara Catholic Church, Malabar Independent Syrian Church, and Mar Thoma Syrian Church).

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Abbreviation

GEDSH

= Brock et al. 2011.

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Further Reading

For a general introduction to the Syriac heritage, one can now consult the recently published encyclopedic dictionary that appeared as *GEDSH*. Here one will find entries, with bibliography, for most of the authors and literary works associated with the classical Syriac tradition as well as broader, more conceptual entries. Macuch 1976 is an indispensable supplement for authors and literature belonging to the later period.

The standard discussions of the use of the term “Assyrian” within the Syriac context are Fiey 1965; de Mauroy 1976; Heinrichs 1993; De Kelaita 1994; Salvesen 1998: 157–8; Odisho 1988; 2001: 3–18; Joseph 2000: 1–32; Becker 2008; Coakley, “Assyrians,” in *GEDSH*, 45. Becker 2015 is an essential publication on this topic, but it appeared after this essay had been submitted. In addition, Coakley 1992 (on the Anglican Mission in Urmia) and Murre-van den Berg 1999 (on the development of Literary Urmia Aramaic) provide essential background information.

Notes

- 1 For readers less familiar with the field of Syriac studies, a brief Appendix follows this essay that lays out the various churches that belong to the Syriac heritage.
- 2 Other terms are occasionally used as well. The Syriac Orthodox scholar Jacob of Edessa (d. 708), for instance, refers to the Syriac literary tradition as “(Meso-)potamian (*nahrāyā*), i.e., Edessene (*ʿurhāyā*), or more

- specifically so to say, Syriac (*suryāyā*)” (Phillips 1869: 11*.1–2 [Syriac text], 9 [English translation]). See Van Rompay 2000: 78.
- 3 The ideology behind *’ārāmāyā* and *suryāyā* was elaborated upon by the Syriac Orthodox patriarch and historian Michael the Great (d. 1199) in an appendix to his world chronicle dedicated to the topic of “the kingdoms that have come about in ancient times from our people (*’umthā*), the Arameans (*’ārāmāyē*), i.e., sons of Aram, (who) were called Syrians (*suryāyē*), i.e., sons of Syria” (ed. Chabot 1899–1910: 3.442–7 [French translation]; 4.748–51 [Syriac text]). See Weltecke 2010.
 - 4 There has been a good deal of confusion in the secondary literature concerning the biography and identity of Bar ‘Ali, for which see now Butts in *GEDSH*, 53–4 and, with more detail, Butts 2009.
 - 5 In contrast, Protestant missionaries in Urmia did not use the name Assyrian (Murre-van den Berg 1999: 37).
 - 6 This connection may well have been based in the Biblical text since the Persian king is called the “king of Assyria” in Ezra 6:22.
 - 7 It should be noted that Becker (2008) has questioned this “folkloric continuity between the Neo-Assyrians and the late Sasanian period” (409) preferring to see the Syriac *History of Qardagh* as a deliberate “Assyrianizing” in which “Syriac-speaking Christians in Mesopotamia employed the Assyria they found in the Bible as well as in Greek sources translated into Syriac as a model for understanding themselves and their place in the world” (398).
 - 8 For earlier usages in the West, see Fiey 1965: 146–8; Heinrichs 1993: 107–8.
 - 9 The Armenian language does not distinguish between Assyrian and Syrian/Syriac, using the adjective *asori* for both.
 - 10 Southgate accepted this claim, arguing that Syriac Orthodox Christians from the Mardin area were “undoubtedly descendants of the Assyrians and not of the Jews” (*Missionary Register* 1843: 129). He thus set up an (implicit) contrast with arguments by A. Grant (1841), who claimed that the Church of the East Christians were one of the ten “lost tribes” of Israel (see also Kawerau 1958: 158 n. 290; Heinrichs 1993: 110 n. 20).
 - 11 I would like to thank J.F. Coakley for suggesting this.
 - 12 For possible 16th- to 18th-century precursors to this construction of identity, see Murre-van den Berg 2004. See also ter Haar Romeny 2010.
 - 13 The development of *’asurāyā* is not directly related to the likely

etymological connection between Assyria and Syria, which has generated a good deal of secondary literature; see, e.g., Nöldeke 1871a; 1871b; Fiey 1965: 142–6; Tvedtnes 1981; Frye 1992; Heinrichs 1993: 102–8; Joseph 1997; Odisho 2001: 13–14; Parpola 2004: 16–21. To the traditional discussion, one can add a relatively new datum from the Phoenician-Luwian bilingual from Çineköy (*editio princeps* in Tekoğlu and Lemaire 2000), in which Phoenician *ʾšr* “Assyria” is paralleled by a Luwian form beginning with a sibilant and no vowel (see Lanfranchi 2005; Rollinger 2006a; 2006b).

- 14 The other branch, the Ancient Church of the East, may have shunned the term “Assyrian” to avoid a nationalistic-sounding name in Iraq (Brock and Coakley, in *GEDSH*, 100).
- 15 This is not to be confused with the periodical of the same name that was later published in Tbilisi.
- 16 I would like to thank Sargon Donabed (Roger Williams University) for kindly providing the Syriac text of the poem. The English translation is mine and departs in places from previous translations.
- 17 It should be noted that Fāʾiq also promoted an Aramean identity.
- 18 The Arabic text was originally published in *al-Majalla al-baṭṭriyarkīya* 1981, 386–9. An English translation, along with the Arabic, is available on the Syriac Orthodox Resources website at <http://sor.cua.edu/Personage/PZakka1/19811129Name.html> (accessed 15 May 2012).

List of Assyrian Kings

Eckart Frahm

The list below gives the names and (if known) the regnal years and dates of the Assyrian kings, preceded by a number that indicates their position within the so-called Assyrian King List (AKL), a Neo-Assyrian chronographic text attested on clay tablets from Ashur, Dur-Šarrukin, and Nineveh. Concerning the period following the reign of Aššur-dan I (ruler no. 83), the AKL is largely reliable, and the dates given for the kings from Tiglath-pileser I (no. 87) onwards can be determined with complete accuracy, thanks to a reference in an entry of the Neo-Assyrian Eponym Chronicle to the solar eclipse of 763 BCE. For the preceding period, however, calendrical problems (see below note 5), and the fact that the data in the AKL from Aššur-dan I backwards are occasionally contradictory or incomplete, or show some discrepancies with other records, have thus far prevented a consensus on the exact dates of the Assyrian kings who ruled during this time.

The list below begins with rulers from the Old Assyrian period. Earlier (but presumably not independent) rulers of Ashur, attested in a variety of sources, include Ititi and Ilaba-andul, both apparently to be dated to the (late) Sargonic period or its immediate aftermath (23rd or 22nd century BCE), and a governor by the name of Zarriqum, who was active during the reign of the Ur III monarch Amar-Suen (2044–2036 BCE). A brief discussion of these leaders is found in [Chapter 2](#).

27 ¹	Sulili/Sulê (= Šilulu?)	
28	Kikkiya	
29	Akiya	
30	Puzur-Aššur I	
31	Šalim-aḫum	
32	Ilušuma	
33	Erišum I (40)	ca. 1974–1935 ²
34	Ikunum (14)	ca. 1934–1921
35	Šarru-kin (Sargon I) (40)	ca. 1920–1881
36	Puzur-Aššur II (8)	ca. 1880–1873
37	Naram-Sin (44/54?)	ca. 1872–1829?
38	Erišum II (20?)	ca. 1828?–1809
39	Šamši-Adad I (33)	ca. 1808–1776
40	Išme-Dagan I (40)	ca. 1776–1737
40a	Mut-Aškur ³	
40b	Rimuš	
40c	Asinum(?)	

40d	Puzur-Sîn (= no. 51?)	
41	Aššur-dugul (6)	
42	Aššur-apla-idi ⁴	
43	Našir-Sîn	
44	Sîn-namir	
45	Ipqi-Ištar	
46	Adad-šalulu	
47	Adasi	
48	Bel-bani (10)	
49	Libaya (17)	
50	Šarma-Adad I (12)	
51	IB-TAR-Sîn (= no. 40d?) (12)	
52	Bazaya (28)	
53	Lullaya (6)	
54	Kidin-Ninua (14)	
55	Šarma-Adad II (3)	
56	Erišum III (13)	
57	Šamši-Adad II (6)	
58	Išme-Dagan II (16)	
59	Šamši-Adad III (16)	
60	Aššur-nirari I (26)	
61	Puzur-Aššur III (14/24)	(first quarter of the 15th century)
62	Enlil-našir I (13)	
63	Nur-ili (12)	
64	Aššur-šadûni (one month)	
65	Aššur-rabi I	
66	Aššur-nadin-aḥḫe I	
67	Enlil-našir II (6)	ca. 1420–1415 ⁵
68	Aššur-nirari II (7)	ca. 1414–1408
69	Aššur-bel-nišešu (9)	ca. 1407–1399
70	Aššur-rem-nišešu (8)	ca. 1398–1391
71	Aššur-nadin-aḥḫe II (10)	ca. 1390–1381
72	Eriba-Adad I (27)	ca. 1380–1354
73	Aššur-uballiṭ I (36)	ca. 1353–1318
74	Enlil-nirari (10)	ca. 1317–1308
75	Ārik-den-ili (12)	ca. 1307–1296
76	Adad-nirari I (32)	ca. 1295–1264
77	Shalmaneser I (30)	ca. 1263–1234
78	Tukulti-Ninurta I (37)	ca. 1233–1197
79	Aššur-nadin-apli (4)	ca. 1196–1193
80	Aššur-nirari III (6)	ca. 1192–1187
81	Enlil-kudurri-ušur	ca. 1186–1182

82	Ninurta-apil-Ekur (13)	ca. 1181–1169
83	Aššur-dan I (36/46)	ca. 1168–1133
84	Ninurta-tukulti-Aššur (?)	ca. 1133?
85	Mutakkil-Nusku (?)	ca. 1133?
86	Aššur-reša-iši I (18)	ca. 1132–1115
87	Tiglath-pileser I (39)	1114–1076
88	Ašared-apil-Ekur (2)	1075–1074
89	Aššur-bel-kala (18)	1073–1056
90	Eriba-Adad II (2)	1055–1054
91	Šamši-Adad IV (4)	1053–1050
92	Aššurnasirpal I (19)	1049–1031
93	Shalmaneser II (12)	1030–1019
94	Aššur-nirari IV (6)	1018–1013
95	Aššur-rabi II (41)	1012–972
96	Aššur-reša-iši II (5)	971–967
97	Tiglath-pileser II (32)	966–935
98	Aššur-dan II (23)	934–912
99	Adad-nirari II (21)	911–891
100	Tukulti-Ninurta II (7)	890–884
101	Aššurnasirpal II (25)	883–859
102	Shalmaneser III (35)	858–824
103	Šamši-Adad V (13)	823–811
104	Adad-nirari III (28)	810–783
105	Shalmaneser IV (10)	782–773
106	Aššur-dan III (18)	772–755
107	Aššur-nirari V (10)	754–745
108	Tiglath-pileser III (18)	744–727
109	Shalmaneser V (5)	726–722 ⁶
110	Sargon II (17)	721–705
111	Sennacherib (24)	704–681
112	Esarhaddon (12)	680–669
113	Assurbanipal (38?)	668–631? ⁷
114	Aššur-etel-ilani (4?)	630?–627?
115	Šîn–šumu-lišir	627?
116	Šîn–šarru-iškun (15?)	626?–612
117	Aššur-uballiṭ II (3)	611–609

Notes

- ¹ The first twenty-six individuals mentioned in the Assyrian King List are said to have “lived in tents” or to have been “ancestors.” Most of them cannot

have been rulers of Ashur. Note, however, that the name of one of the “ancestors,” Aminu, who was allegedly the father of Sulili, is known from two seal inscriptions owned by servants of his. Where exactly he reigned remains unclear. Ušpia, the penultimate king of the section on “tent dwellers,” is said in later Assyrian royal inscriptions to have been the first builder of the Assur temple in Ashur (see [Chapter 18](#)).

- 2 The dates given for Erišum I and the other kings of the Old Assyrian period are those used by Veenhof in [Chapter 3](#) of this volume. For slightly different dates, see G. Barjamovic, T.K. Hertel, and M.T. Larsen, *Ups and Downs at Kanesh: Chronology, History and Society in the Old Assyrian Period*, PIHANS 120, Leiden: NINO 2012. A full discussion of the complex reasons behind the discrepancies cannot be provided here.
- 3 For a discussion of how to reconstruct Assyrian chronology and history during the period from the reign of Mut-Aškur (40a) to that of Kidin-Ninua (54), see [Chapter 5](#) of this volume.
- 4 According to the AKL, rulers nos. 42–47 held their office during the reign of Aššur-dugul, and each apparently for no more than one year.
- 5 It is feasible that the dates for rulers 67–83 have to be raised by ten years (so that Enlil-našir II, for example, would have ruled from 1430 to 1425). The uncertainty is due to the fact that it remains unclear whether Aššur-dan I (ruler no. 83) ruled for thirty-six or forty-six years. An additional problem is caused by the use of a lunar calendar in Middle Assyrian times. Despite their awareness of this practice, most scholars have hitherto assumed that in Middle Assyrian times regnal years were counted according to a solar calendar, and the dates provided above are based on this supposition as well. However, since there is no evidence for intercalation in Middle Assyrian documents from before the 11th century, and due to a number of other reasons, it may be more likely, as recently argued in unpublished studies by Yigal Bloch and Joshua Jeffers, that the regnal years of the Middle Assyrian kings preceding Aššur-bel-kala (no. 89) were all lunar years ca. 11 days shorter than the solar year with its 365.24 days. If so, the dates of rulers 67–86 would have to be modified, with increasing deviations towards the early Middle Assyrian period – for each period of ca. 33.5 years, one year would have to be subtracted from the absolute chronology.
- 6 The available copies of the AKL come to an end with Shalmaneser V. The numerals preceding the names of the Assyrian kings from Sargon II onwards continue the numbering system used up to this point.
- 7 The exact date of Assurbanipal’s last regnal year and the chronology of the years 631–625 remain contested issues. For some bibliographical

references related to the debate, see notes 21 and 22 in [Chapter 8](#).

Index

Compiled with assistance from Jonathan Belz, Jacob Neis, Benjamin Scruton, and Sergio Tang.

The index lists all personal names, divine names, toponyms, and gentilics found in this book, with the exception of modern authors and without taking into account the maps and the “List of Assyrian Kings” at the end of the volume.

Abarnian

Abarsal

Abbasid(s)

Abdi-Milquti

Abiḥ, Mount

Abi-ili, son of Katiri

Abiyate

Abraham

Ab-šalim

Abu Hafur

Abuli

Acemhöyük

Achaemenid(s)

Adab

Adabal

Adad

Adad-apla-iddina

Adad-guppi

Adad-nirari I

Adad-nirari II

Adad-nirari III

Adad-šalulu

Adad-šuma-iddina

Adad-šuma-ušur (Babylonian king)

Adad-šumu-ušur (Assyrian scholar)

Adam

Adapa

Adasi

Adbeel, *see also* [Idibi'ilu \(Adbeel\)](#)

Adda-ḫati

Addikritušu (Antikritos)

Adia

Adiabene

Admetos

Adrammelech

Adummatu (Duma, Dūmat al-Gʿandal)

Aegean Sea

Afghanistan

Agua

Ahab

Ahaz

Aḫazum

Ahiqar

Aḫiyawa

Aḫlamu, *see also* [Aram](#), [Aram\(a\)eans](#)

Aḫšeri

Aḫundari

Aḫuni

Aḫu-waqar

Akbaru

Akestor

Akiya

Akkad, Akkadians, Akkadian state

Akkadian (language)

Akkû

Akkulanu

Alaḥzina

Alašiya

Alborz Mountains

Alemanns

Alexander the Great

Alexandria

Ali-aḥum

Alilat

Al-Jileh

Al-Kosh

al-Lağā

al-Mina'

Alše

Alzu

Amanus, Mount

Amarna

Amar-Suen

Amasakku

Amathus

Amaya

Amazon(s)

Ambaris

Amenhotep IV

Aminum

Amkuwa (Alişar)

Ammon

Amon

Amorite(s), Amurru(m)

Amos

Amur-Ištar

Amurru(m) *see* [Amorite\(s\)](#), [Amurru\(m\)](#)

Amyntas

Anatolia, Anatolian

Anchiale

Andia

Andrae, Walter

Anitta

Anšan, Anzan

Anšar, AN.ŠÁR

Antikritos *see* [Addikritušu \(Antikritos\)](#)

Antimenidas

Antioch

Antiochus I

Anu(m)

Anzan *see* [Anšan, Anzan](#)

Anzû

Apku

Aplaya

Apollo

Apollonios

Apsû

Apum

Aqra

Arabia, Arabian Peninsula, Arabs

Arabian Gulf *see* [Persian Gulf](#)

Arabic (language), (South Arabic)

Aram, Aram(a)eans, *see also* [Aḥlamu](#)

Aramaic (language), (Neo-Aramaic), (Neo-Aramaic), (Literary Urmia Aramaic)

Ararat, *see also* [Urartu](#), [Uruaṭri](#), [Urtian\(s\)](#)

Araxes

Arbaces

Arbactus

Arbail *see* [Arbela \(Arbail, Erbil\)](#)

Arbela (Arbail, Erbil)

Arbelitis

Arbid

Ardashir

Ardys

Aretos

Argišti I

Argišti II

Argištiḫinili

Arik-den-ili

Aristobulus

Aristophanes

Aristotle

Aristoxenus of Tarent

Arkât–ilani

Arman

Armenia

Arpachshad

Arpad(da)

Arramu

Arrapḫa (Kirkuk)

Arsacids

Arslan Tash *see* [Ḫadatu \(Arslan Tash\)](#)

Artāšumara

Artatama II

Artaxerxes II

Artaxerxes III

Arukku

Arwad

Arzaškun

Arzawa

Arzuḫina

Asalluḫe

Ašared-apil-Ekur

Ashdod

Ashkelon

Ashur (city) (Qal‘at Širqaṭ, Libbi-ali), *see also* [Kainai \(Ashur\)](#)

Asinum

Ašipâ

Asordan, *see also* [Aššur-nadin-šumi](#)

Asorestan

Aššukanni *see* [Waššukkanni](#), [Aššukanni](#)

Assur (god)

Aššur *see* [Ashur \(city\)](#); [Assur \(god\)](#)

Aššur-apla-idi

Assurbanipal (Aššur-bāni-apli), *see also* [Osnappar](#); [Sardanapallus](#)

Aššur-bel-ilane

Aššur-bel-kala

Aššur-bel-nišešu

Aššur-bel-šamê

Aššur-bel-ka”in

Aššur-bel-ušur

Aššur-da”in-aplu

Aššur-dan I

Aššur-dan II

Aššur-dan III

Aššur-dugul

Aššur-etel-ilani

Aššur-iddin

Aššur-idi

Aššur-imitti

Aššuritum

Aššur-kašid

Aššur-ketti-lešir

Aššur-nada

Aššur-nadin-aḫḫe I

Aššur-nadin-aḫḫe II

Aššur-nadin-apli

Aššur-nadin-šumate

Aššur-nadin-šumi, *see also* [Asordan](#)

Aššur-našir

Aššur-našir-apli (in Chronicle P)

Aššurnaširpal I

Aššurnaširpal II

Aššur-nirari I

Aššur-nirari II

Aššur-nirari III

Aššur-nirari V

Aššur-nirka-da”in

Aššur-rabi I

Aššur-rabi II

Aššur-rem-nišešu

Aššur-reša-iši I

Aššur-rešuwa

Aššur-šadûni

Aššur-šuma-eriš

Aššur-šuma-iddina

Aššur-šumu-iškun

Aššur-taklalu

Aššur-tapputi

Aššur-uballiṭ I

Aššur-uballiṭ II

Aššur-zera-iddina

Assyrian (language)

Atalia

Atargatis *see* [Derceto \(Atargatis\)](#)

Athenaeus

Āthorāyā, Fredon

Atmanu (Tell Ali)

Atruš/Gomel River, *see also* [Gomel River](#)

Attarsamayīn (Alilat)

(A)tuna, (A)tunaeans

Augustine

Ayam(m)u

Aza

Azerbaiğan

Azraq Oasis

Awal

Baal (King of Tyre)

Baba-šumu-ibni

Babel

Babil

Babilaiu

Babu-aḥa-iddina (high Assyrian official)

Babu-aḥu-iddin (king of Babylon)

Babylon

Babylonia, Babylonians, *see also* [Karduniaš](#)

Babylonian (language, dialect)

Bactria, Bactrians

Baghdad

Bahrain *see* [Dilmun \(Bahrain\)](#)

Balatai

Balawat (Imgur-Enlil)

Baleus

Baliḫ River

Baltasar

Banitu *see* [Yabâ \(Banitu\)](#)

Bardaiṣan

Barsoum, Ignatius Afram

Bartatua

Barû (of Ellipi)

Basianis

Basqanu

Basra

Bastam

Bavian

Bazaya

Bazu

Bderi (Tell)

Beirut

Belat-ekallim

Belatum

Bel-bani

Belesys

Belet-ili

Bel-eṭir

Bel-Ḫarran-bel-uṣur

Bel-ibni

Bel-liqbi

Bel-tarṣi-ilumma

Belum

Belus

Bel-ušeziḫ

Ber-išmanni

Berossus

Beth Garmaï

Biainili, *see also* [Uratu](#), [Uruaṭri](#), [Uartian\(s\)](#)

Binaš

Birdada

Birklin

Bisotun

Bit-Abdadani

Bit-Adini

Bit-Agusi

Bit-Amukani

Bit-Dakkuri

Bit-Ḥamban

Bithynia, Bithynians

Bit-Purutaš

Bit-Yakin, Yakinites

Black Sea

Borsippa

Bostra (Busra)

Botta, Paul Émile

Bouthytes

Bubastis

Bulluṭu

Burckhardt, Jacob

Burman

Burmarina

Burnaburiaš I

Burnaburiaš II

Burušḫanda

Burušḫattum

Busra *see* [Bostra \(Busra\)](#)

Byblos

Byron, Lord

Byzantium

Calah *see* [Kalḫu \(Calah, Nimrud\)](#)

Cambyses

Canaan

Canning, Sir Stratford

Cappadocia(n)

Caracalla

Carchemish (Gargamis)

Carians

Cassius Dio

Castor of Rhodes

Cato Uticensis

Caucasus

Cephalion

Chagar Bazar

Chalcedon, Council of

Chald(a)ean(s)

China, Chinese

Choerilus

Chytroi

Cilicia, *see also* [Ḫilakku](#) (in Cilicia); [Que](#) (in Cilicia)

Cimmerian(s)

Çineköy

Cizre

Cleitarchus

Cooper, Frederick

Ctesias

Ctesiphon

Cyaxares (Umakištar)

Cyclades

Cyprus, *see also* [Yadnana](#)

Cyrus (Kuraš) I

Cyrus (Kuraš) II

Dagan

Dakiki

Dalta

Damascus

Damasos

Damusu

Daniel

Dara

Darib

Darius I

Darius III

Dasht-e-Kavir

Daya

Dayeni

Dayyan-Aššur

Delacroix, Eugène

Demotic (language)

Der

Derceto (Atargatis)

Diḥranu (Dhahran, (aḏ-)Ṣahrān)

Dilbat

Dilmun (Bahrain)

Dinitu

Diodorus Siculus

Dionysus

Diyala River

Diyarbakır

Dohuk

Drehem *see* [Puzriš-Dagan \(Drehem\)](#)

Duara

Dugdamme

Duma *see* [Adummatu \(Duma, Dūmat al-Gʿandal\)](#)

Dūmat al-Gʿandal *see* [Adummatu \(Duma, Dūmat al-Gʿandal\)](#)

Dunna-Şaḥ

Dunnu-ša-Uzibi (Giricano)

Dur-Adad

Dur-Bel-Ḫarran-bel-u-ūsur

Durḫumit

Duri-Aššur

Dur-Katlimmu (Tell Sheikh Hamad)

Dur-Kurigalzu

Dur-Šarrukīn (Khorsabad)

Dur-Yakin

Ea (Enki)

É-am-kur-kur-ra (in Ashur)

Eanna (in Uruk)

Eannatum

Ebla

Eden, Garden of

Edom

Edomite (language)

É-gal-me-šár-ra

Egypt, Egyptian(s)

Egyptian (language)

Eḫli-šarri

Eḫulḫul temple

Ekallatum

Ekaltayu

Ekron

Ekur

É-kur-me-šár-ra

Elagabalus

Elali

Elam, Elamites

Elamite (language)

Elamma

Elephantine

El-Fatḥa strait

Ellesmere, Lord

Ellipi, Ellibi

Eltheke

Emar

Emašmaš temple (in Nineveh)

Enki *see* [Ea \(Enki\)](#)

Enkidu

Enlil

Enlil-kudurri-ušur

Enlil-nadin-šumi

Enlil-našir I

Enlil-našir II

Enlil-nirari

Enna-Dagan

Enoch, Astronomical Book of

‘Ephah *see* [Ḫayapa \(‘Ephah\)](#)

Ephesus, Council of

Ephrem

Erbil *see* [Arbela \(Arbail, Erbil\)](#)

Erebuni

Ereğli

Ereškigal

Eretria

Eriba-Adad I

Eriba-Adad II

Eridu

Erimena

Erišum I

Erišum II

Erišum III

Erra, *see also* [Nergal](#)

Errupi

Esagil (in Babylon)

Esagil-kin-apli

Esarhaddon (Aššur-aḫu-iddina)

Eski Mosul

Ešnunna

Esther

Eteanthros

Etel-pî-Aššur

Ethiopia

Ethiopian (language)

Euboea

Eulmaš temple (in Sippar)

Euphrates River

Europos Dura

Eusebius of Caesarea

Ezekiel

Ezida temple

Ezra

Faida

Fā'iq, Na'ūm

Fars

Fatha

Flandin, Eugène

Fort Shalmaneser

Frankish Empire

Frascati

G'abal al-Aqra'

Gabbu-ilani-ereš

Galilee

Gambulu

Garamaioi

Gargamis *see* [Carchemish \(Gargamis\)](#)

Gasur (Yorgan Tepe)

Ga'uanu (G'awān)

Gaugamela (Tell Gomel)

Gaza (Ḥazzat)

Gaziantep

Germans, German Empire

Gilead

Gilgameš (Gilgamesh)

Gilzanu

Gindibu

Girepan

Giricano *see* [Dunnu-ša-Uzibi \(Giricano\)](#)

Gizilbunda

Gog *see* [Guggu](#)

Gomel River, *see also* [Atruš/Gomel River](#)

Gordion

Gordyene

Gre Virike

Greece, Greek(s)

Gudea

Guggu (Gyges, Gog)

Gula

Gurdi (Kurti(s), Gordias)

Gurgum

Gurmarritu

Gurrean, Gurreans

Gürün *see* [Til-Garimmu \(Gürün\)](#)

Gutium, Gutians, *see also* [Qutû](#)

Guzana (Tell Halaf)

Gyges *see* [Guggu \(Gyges, Gog\)](#)

Ḫabḫu

Ḫabisu

Hadad-ezer

Ḫadatu (Arslan Tash)

Haddu (city)

Ḫaḫḫum

Hakkari

Ḫalab (Aleppo)

Ḫalahḫu

Halawa

Ḫaldi

Ḫallušu-Inšušinak

Ḫalman (Aleppo)

Ḫalpi

Ḫalule

Ḫalzu

Hamadan

Hamath (Ḫamat, Hama)

Hammurabi (Hammurapi)

Hamoukar

Ḥamrin Mountains

Ḥana

Ḥanigalbat

Ḥarbe

Ḥarḥar

Ḥariṣu

Ḥarran

Ḥarsamna

Ḥasan bar Bahlul

Hasanlu

Ḥasmānu

Hašumu Mountains

Ḥatarikka

Hatra

Ḥatti, Ḥattian(s), Hittites, (Neo-Hittites)

Hattic (language(s))

Ḥattum

Ḥattuša

Ḥattušili III

Ḥayapa (‘Ephah)

Hazael (of Damascus)

Ḥaza’il (king of the Arabs)

Hazna

Ḥazû, Mount

Ḥazur River

Ḥazzat *see* [Gaza \(Ḥazzat\)](#)

Hebrew(s)

Hebrew (language)

Hebrew Bible

Hejaz

Hera

Heracles

Hermes

Herodotus

Hesiod

Hezekiah

Ḫilakku (in Cilicia)

Hincks, Edward

Ḫindanu, *see also* Ḫinzanu

Ḫinzanu *see also* Ḫindanu

Hira

Hiram

Hittite (language), *see also* [Neshite \(Proto-Hittite\)](#)

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Homer

Hoshea

Ḫuban-nikaš I

Ḫuban-nikaš II

Ḫuban-nimena

Ḫubuškia

Ḫubušna (Karahüyük)

Ḫudimeri

Huelva

Ḫulli

Ḫundaru

Hurrian (language)

Hurrians

Ḫuzirina (Sultantepe)

Iaones *see* [Ionia](#), [Ionians](#) ([Yam\(a\)nāya](#), [Iaones](#), [Yawan](#))

Ibal

Ibal-pi-El II

Ibaya

Ibiranu

IB.TAR-Sîn

Idalion

Iddin-Aššur

Iddin-Ištar

Iddin-Suen

Idibi'ilu (Adbeel)

Idu

Ignatius Zakkā I 'Iwāṣ

Ikunum

Ikuppia

Ilaba-andul

Ilabrat

Ilabrat-bani

Ila-kabkabuhu

Ilia

Ili-iddina

Ili-padâ

Ilula

Ilušuma

‘Imād al-Dīn Zangī

Imgur-Enlil (wall in Babylon)

Imgur-Enlil *see* [Balawat \(Imgur-Enlil\)](#)

Ina-Aššur-šumi-ašbat

Inanna *see* [Ištar \(Inanna\)](#)

Inarus

Indabibi

India

Indus River

Ionia, Ionians (Yam(a)nāya, Iaones, Yawan)

Ipiq-Adad II

Ipqi-Ištar

Iranzu

Irḥuleni

Irrija

Isaiah

Išḥara

Ishmael

Isho‘ bar ‘Ali

Iši-Dagan

Isin

Isin–Larsa

Iškallu

Išme-Dagan I

Išme-Dagan II

Išpabara

Išpakaya

Išpueni

Israel, Israelite(s)

Issar–šumu–ereš

Issu-arik

Istanbul

Ištar (Inanna)

Ištar of Arbela

Ištar of Ashur

Ištar of Ḫadatu

Ištar of Kalḫu

Ištar of Kidmuru

Ištar of Nineveh

Ištar Šarrat–niphī

Ištaran

Ištar-lamassi

Ištar.ZA.AT

Išum

Išuwa

It'amra (Yiṭa‘'amar Watar)

Ititi

Itu(')ean(s)

Izirtu, Zirta

Izke

Jabriyeh

Jacob (Biblical patriarch)

Jacob of Edessa

Jacobite

Jacobsen, Thorkild

Jaffa

Jebel Abd al-Aziz

Jebel Ḥamrin *see* [Ḥamrin Mountains](#)

Jebel Khalid

Jebel Khanukah

Jebel Makhul

Jebel Sinjar *see* [Sinjar](#), [Jebel](#)

Jebelet al-Beda

Jehu

Jemdat Nasr

Jerablus Tahtani

Jeremiah

Jerusalem

Jerwan

Jesus Christ

Jezira (Jazira)

Jigan

John Malalas

John of Ephesus

John of Tella

Jonah

Joseph

Josiah

Judah, Judean(s)

Judi Dagh *see* [Nipur](#), Mount (Judi Dagh)

Judith

Julius Africanus

Justin

Juvenal

Kablul

Kadašman-Buriaš

Kadašman-Ḫarbe II

Kāf *see* [Kapanu \(Kāf\)](#)

Kainai (Ashur)

Kalakene

Kalbu

Kalḫu (Calah, Nimrud) *see also* [Larissa \(Kalḫu\)](#)

Kali-Teššub

Kallinikos

Kalzu

Kandalanu

Kaniš (Kültepe)

Kapanu (Kāf)

Kaqqadanu

Karahüyük *see* [Ḫubušna \(Karahüyük\)](#)

Karaindaš

Karana

Kar-Aššur-aḥu-iddina (Sidon)

Karduniaš, *see also* [Babylonia](#), Babylonians

Karibili (Karib'il Watar)

Kar-Ištar

Karka d-Beth Slokh

Karkemiš *see* [Carchemish](#) (Gargamis)

Karmir-blur

Kar-Salmanu-ašared (Til-Barsip)

Kar-Šarrukin

Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta (Tulul al-‘Aqar)

Kašijari Mountains *see* [Ṭur ‘Abdin](#), [Tur Abdin](#)

Kaška, Kasku

Kaškašok

Kasku *see* [Kaška](#), [Kasku](#)

Kassite(s)

Kaštiliaš (eponym)

Kaštiliaš (IV)

Katê

Katiri

Katmuḥu

Kayseri

Kazane

Kef Kalesi

Kenk Boghazi

Kerala, India

Kermanshah

Khabur River

Kharab Sayyar

Kharput

Khazir River

Khin(n)is

Khirbat al-Fakhar

Khorasan Road

Khorsabad *see* [Dur-Šarrukin \(Khorsabad\)](#)

Khosr River

Khuzestan

Kidin-Ninua

Kidmuru

Kikkiya

Kili-Teššub

Kilizu

King, Leonard William

Kirkuk *see* [Arrapha \(Kirkuk\)](#)

Kirruri

Kiš

Kišesim

Kiṣir-Aššur

Kisiri Canal

Kiṣir-Nabû

Kismar

Kišan

Kition

Kızıl Irmak

Koldewey, Robert

Kourion

Kronos

Kulišḫinaš

Kullania (Kunalia, Kunulua)

Kültepe *see* [Kaniš \(Kültepe\)](#)

Kulumma

Kummaya

Kumme

Kummuḥ(u)

Kunalia *see* [Kullania](#)

Kundu

Kunilum

Kunulua *see* [Kullania](#)

Kura

Kuraš *see* [Cyrus](#)

Kurbail

Kurda

Kurigalzu II

Kurkh

Kurti(s) *see* [Gurdi \(Kurti\(s\)\)](#), Gordias)

Kush, Kushites, *see also* [Nubia](#), Nubian(s)

Kuššara

Kutha

Kutir-Naḥḥunte

Kuyunjik, *see also* [Nineveh](#)

Lachish

Lagaš

Lagoon, the

Laḥiru

Lamassatum

Lamassi-Aššur

Lamaštu

Lames

Larissa (Kalḥu)

Larnaca

Larsa

Layale

Layard, Austen Henry

Lebanon

Lebanon, Mount

Ledra

Libaya

Libba

Libbi-ali (Libbali) *see* [Ashur \(city\)](#) ([Qal‘at Širqaṭ](#), [Libbi-ali](#))

Libya

Lloyd, Seton

Lubdi

Lud, *see also* [Lydia \(Luddu\)](#), [Lydian\(s\)](#)

Luddu *see* [Lydia \(Luddu\)](#), [Lydian\(s\)](#)

Lulî

Lullaya

Lullubean (language)

Lullumu

Lulu

Lumaš

Luppi

Luristan

Luwian(s)

Luwian (language)

Lydia (Luddu), [Lydian\(s\)](#), *see also* [Lud](#)

Ma'allanate

Macedonia, Macedonians

Madaktu

Magallu

Magan

Magganubba

Makrisa

Malatya *see* [Melid\(du\)](#), [Milidia](#) (near [Malatya](#))

Maltai

Mamu

Manasseh
Maništušu
Mannaya, Mannea, Mannean(s)
Mannuba
Mannu-ki-Aššur
Mannu-lu-ia'u
Manšuate
Maqtalah
Mardamam
Marduk
Marduk-aplu-iddina II (Merodach-baladan)
Marduk-balassu-iqbi
Marduk-bel-usati
Marduk-nadin-aḫḫe
Marduk-šapik-zeri
Marduk-šumu-ušur
Marduk-zakir-šumi
Marḫaši
Mari (Tell Hariri)
Marion
Marqasa
Ma'rubbu
Mašḫaṭ-šarri
Massa
Mati'ilu
Mazamua *see* [Zamua \(Mazamua\)](#)
Media, Medes
Mediterranean Sea
Megiddo
Melebiya
Melid(du), Milidia (near Malatya)

Meluḥḥa

Memphis

Menahem

Merodach-baladan *see* [Marduk-aplu-iddina II \(Merodach-baladan\)](#)

Mesanepada

Mespila (Nineveh)

Metatti

Micah

Michael the Great

Midas *see* [Mita \(Midas\)](#)

Mila Mergi

Miletus

Milidia *see* [Melid\(du\)](#), Milidia (near Malatya)

Milku-ramu

Mita (Midas)

Mithridates I

Mitinti

Mittani

Moab

Moabite (language)

Mohammed Arab

Mohl, Jules

Moscow

Mosul *see also* [Nineveh](#)

Mozan *see* [Urkeš \(Mozan\)](#)

Muballiḫat-Šerua

Mugallu

Muḡesir *see* [Muṣaṣir \(near Muḡesir\)](#)

Muḥur-ilane

Mukin-zeri

Mullissu

Mullissu-mukannišat-Ninua

Mu'na

Murat-Su

Mušašir (near Muğesir)

Mušeziḫ-Marduk

Mušku

Muṣri, Mount

Mussi

Mutakkil–Nusku

Mut-Aškur

Mygdonia

Nabar-utti

Nabayatu

Nabium *see* [Nabû \(Nabium\)](#)

Nabonidus

Nabopolassar

Nabû (Nabium)

Nabû-aḫu-iddina

Nabû-aplu-iddina

Nabû-bel-ka'in

Nabû-bessunu

Nabû-eṭir

Nabû-ili

Nabû-iqbi

Nabukhodonosor

Nabula

Nabû-nadin-šumi

Nabû-našir

Nabû-šumu-ukin

Nabû-ušur

Nabû-zeru-lešir

Nabû-zuqup-kenu

Nachordan

Nagar (Tell Brak)

Nagub tunnel

Nahr al-‘Uzem *see* [Radanu River \(Nahr al-‘Uzem, Ṭawuq Gay\)](#)

Nahr el-Kalb

Nahr Malkha

Nahum

Nairi

Najafehabad

Nakhthor

Namri

Namtar

Nanaya

Nanaya-ila’i

Nanna *see* [Sîn \(Suen, Nanna\)](#)

Naphûrureya

Naqia

Naqsh-i Rustam

Naram-Sîn of Akkad

Naram-Sîn (Assyrian king)

Narzuḫina

Naṣibina (Nisibis, Nusaybin)

Naṣir-Sîn

Nasuh *see* [Nusku \(Nasuh\)](#)

Natnu

Nawar

Nazibugaš *see* [Šugaš \(Nazibugaš\)](#)

Nazi-Maruttaš

Neapolis

Nebi Yunus, *see also* [Nineveh](#)

Nebuchadnezzar (modern given name)

Nebuchadnezzar I

Nebuchadnezzar II, *see also* [Nabukhodonosor](#)

Nehemiah

Nemad-Ištar

Nemed-Tukulti-Ninurta

Nemetti-šarri

Nemuš, Mount

Nergal, *see also* [Erra](#)

Nergal-apil-kumu'a

Nergal-ereš (or Palil-ereš)

Nergal-ila'i

Nergal-ušešib

Neriglissar

Neshite (Proto-Hittite)

Nestorian(s)

Nibe

Niebuhr, Carsten

Niğde

Niḥriya

Nikephorion (Raqqa)

Nile River

Nimrod

Nimrud *see* [Kalḫu](#) (Calah, Nimrud)

Nineveh, *see also* [Kuyunjik](#); [Mespila](#) (Nineveh); [Nebi Yunus](#)

Ningal

Ninḫursag

Ninkarrak

Ninlil

Ninmah

Ninšiku

Ninu'ayu

Ninurta

Ninurta-apil-Ekur

Ninurta-idiya-šukšid

Ninurta-kudurri-ušur

Ninurta-nadin-šumi

Ninurta-tukulti–Aššur

Ninus, Ninos

Ninyas

Nippur

Nipur, Mount (Judi Dagħ)

Nisaba

Nisibin, Nisibis *see* [Našibina \(Nisibis, Nusaybin\)](#)

Nisroch

Nubia, Nubian(s), *see also* [Kush](#), Kushites

Nuhay

Nunamnir

Nur-ili

Nurrugum

Nusaybin *see* [Našibina \(Nisibis, Nusaybin\)](#)

Nusku (Nasuh)

Nuzi (Yorgan Tepe)

Oates, David

Olmstead, Albert T.

Oman

Onasagoras

Onnes

Opis

Origen

Orobazes

Orontes River

Orosius

Orotalt *see* [Ruḏā](#)

Osnappar (Assurbanipal)

Osorkon IV, *see also* [So \(possibly Osorkon IV\)](#)

Osrhoene

Ottoman Empire

Özgüç, Tahsin

Pade (king of Qade)

Paḏî (king of Ekron)

Pa'e

Palestine

Palil-ereš *see* [Nergal-ereš \(or Palil-ereš\)](#)

Palmyra, *see also* [Tadmar](#)

Pani-Aššur-lamur

Paphos

Papḥu

Parapotamia

Parsua(š)

Parthia, Parthian(s)

Pat(t)in(a/u) *see* [Unqi \(Pat\(t\)in\(a/u\)\)](#)

Pekah

Pelusium

Persia, Persian(s)

Persian Gulf

Philagoras

Philistia (Pilistu), Philistines

Phocylides

Phoenicia, Phoenician(s)

Phoenician (language)

Phraortes

Phrygia, Phrygians

Pilaḥ-Ištar

Pilašqi

Pir Huseyn

Pithana

Place, Victor

Pliny

Plutarch

Polybius

Pompeius Trogus

Pompey

Priam

proto-Semitic (language)

Prusias II

Psammetichus I

Ptolemy

Puda' (Fūda)

Puḥame

Pulu, Pul, Phulos *see* [Tiglath-pileser III \(Tukulti-apil-Ešarra, Pulu, Pul, Phulos\)](#)

Purulumzu

Pussam

Puzriš-Dagan (Drehem)

Puzur-Aššur (ghee trader)

Puzur-Aššur I

Puzur-Aššur II

Puzur-Aššur III

Puzur-Ištar

Puzur-Sîn

Qabra

Qade

Qadhiah

Qal‘at Širqaṭ *see* [Ashur \(city\)](#) (Qal‘at Širqaṭ, Libbi-ali)

Qanâ

Qaqun

Qardagh

Qarninu

Qarqar

Qarrad-Aššur

Qart-hadasht

Qaṭaba’ (Qatīf)

Qaṭṭara (Tell al-Rimah)

Qedar, Qedarites

Qibi-Aššur

Qisu

Que (in Cilicia)

Qumanu *see* (U)qumanu, Uqumeni

Qumran

Qurdi-Aššur-lamur

Qutû, *see also* [Gutium](#), Gutians

Quwair

Radanu River (Nahr al-‘Uzem, Ṭawuq Gay)

Raḥimi-il

Ra’imâ

Ramadi

Ramses II

Rapiqu

Raqa’i

Raqqa *see* [Nikephorion \(Raqqā\)](#)

Ra’s al-Bassīṭ

Rašappa

Rassam, Hormuzd

Rawda

Rawlinson, Sir Henry Creswicke

Rehoboth-ir

Reš temple

Resen

Rezin

Rhodes

Rich, Claudius

Rijm

Rimuš (king of Akkad)

Rimuš (king of Assyria)

Rome, Romans

Rubar Dohuk River

Ruḏā

Rusa I

Rusa II

Šaba *see* [Sheba](#)

Šadi-Teššub

Šadûnu

Sahend *see* [Wauš, Mount \(Sahend\)](#)

Sais

Šakriušwe

Salamis

Šalim-aḥum

Salmanu

Salmanu-mušabši

Salmanu-šuma-ušur

Sam'al(lā)

Samaria

Samarra

Šamaš (Utu)

Šamaš-aḥa-iddina

Šamaš-aḫḫe-iddina

Šamaš-nadin-aḫḫe

Šamaš-šuma-lešir

Šamaš-šumu-ukin (Sammuges, Samoges)

Šamaš-zera-iddina

Sammuges, Samoges *see* [Šamaš-šumu-ukin \(Sammuges, Samoges\)](#)

Sammu-ramat (Semiramis)

Samos

Samsat

Samsi

Šamši-Adad I (Samsi-Addu)

Šamši-Adad II

Šamši-Adad III

Šamši-Adad IV

Šamši-Adad V

Samsi-Addu *see* [Šamši-Adad I](#)

Šamši-ilu

Samsimuruna

Samsuiluna

Sandakurru

Sangarios River

Sanharīb (modern given name)

Saqgez

SaQurri, Mount

Sarakos *see* [Šîn-šarru-iškun \(Sarakos\)](#)

Sardanapallus *see also* [Assurbanipal \(Aššur-bāni-apli\)](#)

Sarduri I

Sarduri II

Sarduri III/IV

Sar-e Pol-e Zohab

Sargon (modern given name)

Sargon I (Šarru-kin, king of Assyria)

Sargon II (Šarru-ukin, king of Assyria)

Sargon of Akkad

Šariptu

Šarkališarri

Šarma-Adad I

Šarma-Adad II

Šarramaten

Šarrat-nip̄i

Sasan

Sasanian Empire

Šašili

Šattiwaza

Šattuara I

Šattuara II

Šauška

Šauštatar

Saxons

Sayanis

Scythians

Sebetti

Šeḥna (Tell Leilan)

Seleucia-on-the-Tigris

Seleucids

Semiramis *see* [Sammu-ramat \(Semiramis\)](#)

Šemšara

Senakherim *see* [Sennacherib \(Sîn-aḫḫe-eriba, Senakherim\)](#)

Sennacherib (modern given name)

Sennacherib (Sîn-aḫḫe-eriba, Senakherim)

Šep-Aššur

Septimus Severus

Serpot

Šerua (Seru'a)

Šerua-eṭirat

Sevan, Lake

Shahrizor

Shallalat

Shalman (possibly Shalmaneser III)

Shalmaneser I

Shalmaneser II

Shalmaneser III

Shalmaneser IV

Shalmaneser V (Ululayu)

Sharezer

Sheba (Šaba), Sabaean

Shebitku

Shem

Shem'on, Eshai

Sherif Khan *see* [Tarbiṣu \(Sherif Khan\)](#)

Šibaniba

Sidon, *see also* [Kar-Aššur-aḫu-iddina \(Sidon\)](#)

Šiḫum/Šilum

Šilḫak-Inšušinak

Silope

Šilulu (Sulili/Sulê)

Šimanum

Šimat-Ištar

Šimirra

Sîn (Suen, Nanna)

Sîn-aḫu-ušur

Sinai

Sîn-apla-iddina

Sinjar, Jebel

Sîn-mudammîq

Sîn-namir

Sîn-šarru-iškun (Sarakos)

Sîn-šumu-lišir

Šinuḫtu

Sippar

Sira

Sirach

Širwāḥ

Sissû

Sittakene

So (possibly Osorkon IV)

Soloi

Sophene

Suabu (Sumu-abum)

Subartu, Šubartum, Šubaru, Šubur, Subaraean(s)

Šubat

Šubat-Enlil (Tell Leilan)

Šu-Belum

Subnat River

Šubria, Šubrian(s)

Šubur *see* [Subartu](#), [Šubartum](#), [Šubaru](#), [Šubur](#), [Subaraean\(s\)](#)

Suen *see* [Sîn](#) (Suen, Nanna)

Sugaga

Šugaš (Nazibugaš)

Suḫi, Suhu(m)

Šu-iliya

Sulaimaniye

Šulgi

Sulili/Sulê *see* [Šilulu](#) (Sulili/Sulê)

Sulla

Šulmu-šarri

Sultantepe *see* [Huzirina \(Sultantepe\)](#)

Šumaya

Sumer, Sumerian(s)

Sumerian language

Šumma-balaṭ

Sumu-abum

Sumu'il

Šumu-ukin

Şupat

Šuppiluliuma I

Šuppiluliuma II

Susa

Susiana

Šu-Sîn

Suti'u, Sutians

Šutruk-Naḫḫunte

Šuttarna III

Sweyhat

Sybaris

Syncellus

Syriac

Tabal(u)

Ṭabetu, Tell Ṭaban

Ṭab-šil-Ešarra

Tabua

Tacitus

Tadmar, *see also* [Palmyra](#)

Taharqa

Taidu

Taklak-ana-Aššur

Tamaritu

Tamassos

Tammuz

Tamudi (Ṭamūd)

Tanais River

Tanis

Tantamani

Tar'am-Agade

Taram-Uram

Tarbašḫe

Tarbiṣu (Sherif Khan)

Tarshish *see* [Tarsisi \(Tarshish\)](#)

Tarsisi (Tarshish)

Tarsus

Tašmetu(m)

Tastiate

Taurus Mountains

Ṭawuq Gay *see* [Radanu River \(Nahr al-‘Uzem, Ṭawuq Gay\)](#)

Te'elḫunu

Tela

Teli-Šarruma

Tell Abta

Tell Afar

Tell Ahmar, *see also* [Til-Barsip \(Tell Ahmar\)](#)

Tell al-Hawa

Tell Ali *see* [Atmanu \(Tell Ali\)](#)

Tell al-Rimah, *see* [Qaṭṭara \(Tell al-Rimah\)](#)

Tell Banat

Tell Baqrta

Tell Beydar

Tell Bi'a *see* [Tuttul](#)

Tell Brak *see* [Nagar \(Tell Brak\)](#)

Tell Chuera

Tell ed-Daim

Tell el-Amarna *see* [Amarna](#)

Tell Fekheriyeh

Tell Gomel *see* [Gaugamela \(Tell Gomel\)](#)

Tell Halaf *see* [Guzana \(Tell Halaf\)](#)

Tell Hariri *see* [Mari \(Tell Hariri\)](#)

Tell Imlihiye

Tell Khoshi

Tell Leilan, *see also* [Šeḫna \(Tell Leilan\)](#), [Šubat-Enlil \(Tell Leilan\)](#)

Tell Mozan

Tell Sabi Abyad

Tell Sheikh Hamad *see* [Dur-Katlimmu \(Tell Sheikh Hamad\)](#)

Tell Ṭaban *see* [Ṭabetu](#), [Tell Ṭaban](#)

Tell Taya

Tell Tayinat

Tell Uskof

Telloh

Tema

Te'ri

Terqa

Teššub

Teumman

Teušpa

Teutamus

Tharthar, Wadi

Thebes

Thompson, Reginald Campbell

Thouras-Ares

Thutmose III

Tiamat

Tiglath-pileser I

Tiglath-pileser III (Tukulti-apil-Ešarra, Pulu, Pul, Phulos)

Tigris River

Til-Abne

Til-Barsip (Tell Ahmar), *see also* [Kar-Salmanu-ašared \(Til-Barsip\)](#)

Til-Garimmu (Gürün)

Till-Abnû

Tillê

Tilmun *see* [Dilmun \(Bahrain\)](#)

Til-Tuba

Tiš-atal

Tišpak

Titriş

Tobit

Toprakkale

Trajan

Transjordan

Troy

Tuatti *see* [Tuwatis](#), [Tuatti](#)

Tuba (Umm el-Marra)

Tuba'lu

Tudḥaliya IV

Tu'immu

Tukulti-Mer

Tukulti-Ninurta I

Tukulti-Ninurta II

Tulul al-‘Aqar *see* [Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta \(Tulul al-‘Aqar\)](#)

Ṭur ‘Abdin, Tur Abdin

Ṭuroyo

Turšan

Turukkean(s)

Tuṣḥan (Ziyaret Tepe)

Ṭuṣpa

Tuṣratta

Tuttul

Tuwatis, Tuatti

Tuz Gölü

Tyre

Uabu

U'aite

Ubaše

Ugarit, Ugaritic

Ugar-Sallu

Ukku

Uku

Ulay River

Ullusunu

Ululayu *see* [Shalmaneser V \(Ululayu\)](#)

Umakištar *see* [Cyaxares \(Umakištar\)](#)

Umm el-Marra *see* [Tuba \(Umm el-Marra\)](#)

Unqi (Pat(t)in(a/u))

Uperi

Upumu

(U)qumanu, Uqumeni

Uqumeni *see* (U)qumanu, Uqumeni

Ur

Urad-ilane

Urartian (language)

Uratu, Uruaṭri, Urartian(s), *see also* [Ararat](#); [Biainili](#)

Urbil

Urdu-Gula

Urdu-Mullissi

Urfa

Urḫi-Teššub

Urkeš (Mozan)

Urmia (city)

Urmia, Lake

Urraṭīnaš

Uršu

Urtak

Uruaṭri *see* [Urtu](#), [Uruaṭri](#), [Urtian\(s\)](#)

Uruk

Urumu

Ušpia

Ušû

Uṣur-namkur-šarre

Utḫi

Utnapištim

Utu *see* [Šamaš \(Utu\)](#)

Van, Lake

Varro

Wadi Ajij

Wadi al-Milah

Wadi al-Murr

Wadi Bahandawaya (Wadi Bandwai)

Wadi Bastura

Wadi El-Arish

Wadi Sirḫan

Wadi Tharthar

Walli

Waršama

Wasašatta

Waššukkanni, Aššukanni

Wasusarmas, Wassurme

Wauš, Mount (Sahend)

Wazaun

Wilhelm II, German Kaiser

Wišdiš

Xenophon

Yabâ (Banitu)

Yabnan

Yadi'

Yadnana, *see also* [Cyprus](#)

Yaḥḥalu

Yaḥdun-Lim

Yahweh

Yakinites *see* [Bit-Yakin](#), [Yakinites](#)

Yamani

Yamḥad

Yam(a)nāya *see* [Ionia](#), [Ionians](#) (Yam(a)nāya, Iaones, Yawan)

Yaqut

Yasmaḥ-Addu

Yati'e

Yau-bi'di

Yawan *see* [Ionia](#), [Ionians](#) (Yam(a)nāya, Iaones, Yawan)

Yiṭa'amar Watar (It'amra)

Yorgan Tepe *see* [Gasur \(Yorgan Tepe\)](#); [Nuzi \(Yorgan Tepe\)](#)

Zab River, Greater (or Upper) Zab

Zab River, Lower Zab

Zababa-šuma-iddina

Zaban

Zabibe

Zagros Mountains

Zakho

Zakur

Zalpa

Zamaḥu

Zamban

Zamua (Mazamua)

Zanqi, Zaqqā

Zarpanitu

Zarriqum

Zechariah

Zephaniah

Zeugma

Zeus

Zikirtu

Zimrilim

Zincirli

Zirta *see* [Izirtu](#), [Zirta](#)

Ziyaret Tepe *see* [Tuşḫan \(Ziyaret Tepe\)](#)

Zoroaster

Zupa

Zuzu

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